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MacDonald, Jessica A. (Ph.D., Communication)

An Investigation of Communication Values and Normative Principles Embedded  
in a Public/Private Partnership

Dissertation directed by Professor Stanley A. Deetz

Abstract

Because the world is constantly changing, requiring creative and innovative solutions in business, government, and local communities, collaboration offers a unique way of organizing to meet changing needs. Public/private partnerships, a particular type of collaboration, are rising in importance and popularity because of the unique blend of resources they offer to solve problems. People cannot work together to solve these problems without communication. This dissertation project examines espoused and embedded preferences for specific communication practices in the context of a public/private partnership. Using qualitative methods of participant observation and interviews, this study analyzes people's normative ideas about communication and the consequences they have for collaborative decision-making. The research examines a legislatively mandated county-wide collaborative public/private partnership designed to solve problems related to early childhood education.

Three clusters of preferences of communication emerged from espoused and embedded preferences within interviews and meetings. These preferences include a need for information, decision-making, and building relationships. Each of the clusters informs a different way of looking at the world and thus a different perspective of how communication is valued. People had different yet legitimate ideas of the purpose of communication in their partnership. Surprisingly, process

rules about communication were rarely considered and as a result the partnership meetings were neither participative nor collaborative. Little interaction occurred and no decisions were made. Without a discussion around their different viewpoints, the participants were unable to accomplish what they wanted. This dissertation concludes with a discussion of consequences and findings for how people's different preferences of communication play out in a collaboration. It reports that native models of communication do not really ask what those theories bring to collaboration. I offer implications for practice and theory from this research such as the fact that participants need an acculturation process sympathetic to collaboration and that experience will help them.

**Key Words:** communication, collaboration, public/private partnership



AN INVESTIGATION OF COMMUNICATION PREFERENCES AND  
NORMATIVE PRINCIPLES EMBEDDED IN A PUBLIC/PRIVATE  
PARTNERSHIP

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Department of Communication

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## CHAPTER 1: COMMUNICATION IN PUBLIC/PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS: THE KEY TO TOMORROW

“We will surely get to our destination if we join hands.” Aung San Suu Kyi

Collaboration plays an important role in communities, businesses and governments on local and global levels. Traditional ways of organizing cannot always handle a turbulent world with current economic, social, and political trends. Complex problems require innovative solutions that can only come when the right people sit down and work out issues. First, I will show how important collaboration is to a number of enterprises today. Next, I will explain one of these collaborative approaches, the public/private partnership. Finally, I will argue why communication is core to the success of any collaborative effort. We know that people’s views of communication impact organizations, but few have studied how people in collaborations think about communication. This chapter describes trends in the world that demand collaboration now. Next, it characterizes the growing need for and success of one type of collaborative effort, the public-private partnership. When public entities and private sector businesses come together, communication is central to their process of collaborating. Many scholars have written about the relationship between communication and collaboration. Generally they focus on descriptions of collaborative efforts or offer advice. But they do not look at how people think communication should work and the consequences of their views. The chapter concludes with research questions for this dissertation and a preview of the other chapters.

## SITUATIONS IN WHICH IT MAKES SENSE TO COLLABORATE

Several scholars have listed reasons why industrialized countries are turning to more participative ways of organizing. For example, Gray (1989) identifies six "contextual factors" present in a turbulent world that are "incentives" for collaboration. These are:

rapid economic and technological change; declining productivity growth and increasing competitive pressures; global interdependence; blurring of boundaries between business, government, and labor; shrinking federal revenues for social programs; and, dissatisfaction with the judicial process for solving problems (p. 29).

These six reasons are supported by several others listed in Siebold and Shea's (2001) review of participation literature (Bachrack and Botwinick; Cheney, 1995, 1999; Cheney, Stohl, Dennis & Harrison, 1998; Clegg, 1983; Fairhurst, Green and Courtright, 1995; Lawler, 1991; Stohl, 1995; McLagan and Nel, 1995). While Siebold and Shea (2001) name these reasons, they also add "globalization;...changes in workplace demographics, and the stance of organized labor toward these changes; and philosophical arguments are moral injunctions for workplace democracy" (p. 664). Professional literature has also focused on why our organizations need to change from traditional, bureaucratic, hierarchical ways of organizing to more participative forms. Once again globalization and technology are highlighted as reasons to become more participative as well as the rise of the customer, the fact that information is easily available, and the complexity of today's problems demand participation (McLagan and Nel, 1995).

Finally, others argue that in addition to these reasons for collaboration we also need to look at entitlement. They argue today's workers are entitled to

actively participate in their organizations. With the amount of time spent at work, the sacrifice of one's personal life and decisions such as where to live, how to raise a family, etc. people feel entitled to be able to participate in decision-making and not be subject to the autocratic or bureaucratic institutions that have told them what to do for so long.

This paper will discuss the six factors Gray (1989) and others named, and a seventh, entitlement, as reasons for participation. A more careful look at each of these will help contextualize the move to collaboration, identify the hopes for collaborative efforts and put us in the position to begin to assess how a real collaboration fulfills these goals.

Economic and technological change affects all of us. We look for strategic ways our organization can keep up with all of the changes in the economy and with regard to technology. Yet acting as one, individual organization, we are limited in planning how to change. We are unaware of all of the pieces of the puzzle that affect us. New technologies make previous technologies obsolete quickly. New computers are outdated as soon as they leave the store. Organizations are rushed to develop a product and get it out on the market quickly to stay competitive. Likewise, the United States needs to maintain its competitive edge by staying current with technological changes.

Organizations have figured out ways to partner and develop competitive advantage to increase their productivity. For example, they can share both the wealth of R&D and the cost of it. These partnerships enable companies that have already developed a product or worked in a specific market to share knowledge

with others in exchange for their market niche information. This reduces risk and allows for innovation in areas that need it.

Under this heading of economic and technological change, Gray (1989) also highlights the partnership between businesses and universities to “exchange expertise, expand market access, and reduce competition” and public-private partnerships to “cope with economic decline and stimulate socioeconomic revitalization” (p. 35). Gray cites declining productivity as another situational factor illustrating how our world could benefit from collaboration.

Gray identifies the decline of productivity growth and the pressure of foreign competition as a reason collaboration could help U.S. companies. She defines labor productivity growth as “output per hour of work” (p. 34). Cheney (1995) describes this idea as a “push for greater productivity in all sectors” (p. 168). Gray (1989) reports the U.S. labor productivity growth dropped from 3.3% per year for 1946-1965 to 1.4 % per year from 1965 to 1985. Although it remained around 1.4% per year through 1995, it rose to 2.5% per year from 1995 to 2000. The emphasis on homeland security, the war on terrorism, and the war in Iraq, however, has added new economic challenges for the U.S. (Hubbard, 2003).

Gray (1989) also reports productivity growth as compared to other industrialized nations fell sharply. For example, in 1964 the U.S. provided 46% of all machine tools to the industry. That percentage fell to 4% in 1986. Similarly, in 2002, six European countries showed higher productivity than the U.S. Gray attributes the foreign competition as one main factor the U.S. companies changed the way they do business such as implementing more



participative forms of management, computer-integrated manufacturing, collaboration between functional units, and cooperation between unions and management. These trends continue today as workers must be more knowledgeable and therefore have more input into planning. All of these issues with productivity are tied to global interdependence.

Columbia University researcher, Lewin (1988), conducted two studies in which he collaborated with Carnegie Mellon University, the World Bank and the U.S. Department of Labor. He found significant causal relationships between human resource practices and the bottom line. "Companies that combine group economic participation, intellectual participation, flexible job design, and training and development get an added productivity boost-two-thirds of the difference observed in bottom-line impact was due to the combined efforts of these practices" (in McLagan and Nel, 1995, p. 31-2).

The cliché, "It's a small world," could not be more true today. With communications technology and relatively open trade to many parts of the world, globalization has tied our local economies to international issues. Many of our local airlines are part of strategic alliances offering service all over the world. This connectivity has introduced the need for international collaboration. Consider the response to the Sars virus from public, private, governmental, international agencies, and nongovernmental organizations. Gray (1989) explained how traditional theories of international relations portray nation-states as "primary actors, but now the pattern of interactions is much more complex and includes many nongovernmental actors" (p. 39).

What happens around the world affects us in our local towns. Most of us have personally experienced periods of extremely high gas prices at our local station due to turbulence in parts of the world that supply us with gas and oil. Here we see the interdependence of economic, resource, and political influences. The U.S. imports 52% of its requirement of oil necessitating the development of a relationship not only with the traditional markets that extract oil, but also markets with oil, such as Africa. We are globally interdependent and must work with international organizations such as the International Energy Agency, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, and maybe predominately the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries who are expected to supply between 54-67% of the world's oil by 2020 (Strengthening Global Alliances).

These aforementioned examples of relationships between different organizations with a stake in an issue are called partnering. People and organizations have figured out they can get so much more if they work together. Some of the organizations are public, and others are private. Regardless, many decisions made on complex issues such as oil have social, political and economic consequences, which has led to a fuzzy boundary between sectors.

The fourth incentive to collaborate is the blurring of boundaries between business, labor and government. "Global competition is also forcing a redefinition of the roles of labor and management and is raising questions about the role of government in protecting domestic labor from layoffs and from foreign immigration" (Gray, 1989, p. 41). Gray reported many American businesses were forced to either close or lay off their work force due to productivity decline. She

reported union membership decreased from 24.1% in 1979 to 17.5% in 1986. In 2001, 13.2% of the workforce belonged to the union ([www.aflcio.org](http://www.aflcio.org)) so this trend is continuing to spiral downward. Despite this trend, those unions in place are participating more than ever with management making decisions not only about wages, but also about "health, safety, plant closings and job security" (Gray, 1989, p. 42). Ichinowski and Shaw (1995) researched the majority of the steel producing plants in the United States. They concluded systems of participation, not just isolated practices, have the most impact. "What makes a difference is the presence of systems of cooperative labor-management relations and participative practice" (in McLagan and Nel, 1995, p. 36).

Businesses and government have a close working relationship and need to collaborate in many arenas, particularly defense and space research. Similarly, when private, public, and various governmental agencies need to make innovative changes to their operations or work on challenges such as hazardous waste disposal, it just makes sense for them to collaborate and have as much information from different angles including technical information, legal matters, and possible consequences (Gray, 1989). This will help foster more consensus on policies and resolve disputes. In the late 1990s, collaboration in the form of policy dialogues between NGOs, governmental policy makers, intergovernmental organizations, and public and private entities worked on the air pollution problem in developing countries. Since air pollution crosses boundaries, affected regions came together in Asia-Pacific, Latin America, and Africa and developed plans to prevent and

control air pollution ([www.york.ac.uk/inst/sei/rapid2/policy/pold1.html](http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/sei/rapid2/policy/pold1.html)). Social problems are another area that crosses boundaries.

We all have seen or heard about a sharp decline in federal funds for social programs. This is another reason collaboration is so important in today's world. Public-private partnerships emerged in the mid-1980s between social agencies, local governments and the private sector to work on issues such as "economic redevelopment, education, housing, employment and adult literacy" (Fosler and Berger, 1982; Brooks, Liebman and Schelling, 1984; Davis, 1986 in Gray, 1989, p.46). The economic outlook is not much better now. According to the National League of Cities, municipal budgets are stretched thinner than they have been since the early 1990s. Similarly, with federal mandates to invest in homeland security and education, state budgets are stretched. One way to solve this problem is to raise taxes, but most taxpayers shy away from that option. Private resources offer a way to bring innovation to the public (National Council for Public Private Partnerships).

The final place that Gray (1989) identifies a need for collaboration is in situations where there is dissatisfaction with court-initiated solutions. Gray attributes a rise in litigation to "a growing philosophy of entitlement" (p. 48) in America. Many factors including an increase in civil court cases, the backlog in courts, the cost of litigation, and the time it takes to go to trial are all reasons to try alternative resolution. If organizations can collaborate to find a resolution, they will save time because they already understand the particular situation including any applicable technical issues. They will be able to identify all of the

stakeholders involved in the issue, not just the prosecution and defense. They will be able to be more innovative in finding a solution than what the court will allow and therefore should be more satisfied with the result. They will develop a working communication that may extend beyond the particular problem they are tackling, and they will be able to track the results.

Worker entitlement is the seventh reason collaboration is vitally needed in today's workplace. Cheney (1995) argues that workers are entitled to participate in their organizations. He cites Sashkin (1984) who argued, "participative management is an ethical imperative, not only because it is consistent with democratic principles but also because it satisfies basic needs, enhances health and increases productivity" (p. 168). He also sites Bachrach and Botwinick (1992) who from a political stance supported workers' rights to participate in decision- making that affects them at work. Chrislip and Larson (1994) explained how citizens want to participate in working on issues affecting them thus making the case community collaborations. They think the trend in business, education, family and children services, and health care is moving toward collaboration to "create a shared vision and joint strategies to address concerns that go beyond the purview of any particular party" (p. 5). McLagan and Nel (1995) summed up this seventh incentive for collaboration when they wrote, "participation at least means that there are legitimate forums where representatives of future generations can and must be heard" (p. 21).

The aforementioned incentives for collaboration are not the only conditions to consider that invite collaboration. Collaboration offers a way of

dealing with complex problems with high conflict and multiple priorities, where participants can see the value of sharing resources and developing a win-win solution that is creative, innovative, and effective. One specific type of collaboration mentioned many times above is a public-private partnership. The need for this specific type of collaborative effort and their influence is building in a post-911 world that has returned focus to the community.

### PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

Gray (1989) specifically mentions public-private partnerships as a collaborative response to economic and technological change and shrinking federal revenues. She argues the intended impact of public-private partnerships “cope with economic decline and stimulate socioeconomic revitalization” (p. 35). I argue all of the incentives for collaboration Gray identified, more than just economic and technological change and shrinking federal revenues, directly affect communities and have the potential to create problems in them. For example, in a decreased productivity scenario where a firm was forced to close one of its plants, the community would very much be affected by a plant or factory closing. Taber, Walsh and Cooke (1979) studied a public-private manufacturing firm to help workers affected by the closing of a specific plant. That partnership was touted as a success and much needed in that community.

Public/private partnerships join public and private sector resources to work on a solution to a community problem. They have been in existence since the early 1860s when government-owned lands were part of the assets the private companies needed to raise money to build railroads. Once the track was laid, the

government would sell 5 acres around the track to private developers who could entice people to buy them and use the railroad (Norment, 2002). Public-private partnerships tackle a variety of issues including: housing, utilities, wastewater treatment, food, safety, employment, healthcare, childcare, teenage pregnancy, education, drugs, environmental issues, transportation, and development.

Many organizations are turning to public-private partnerships for a variety of reasons. A 1998 survey by the U.S. Council of State Governments asked respondents the reasons they supported public-private partnerships over the past five years. The results were: cost savings 41%; lack of in-house personnel and expertise 33%; lack of State supported political leadership 31%; flexibility and less red tape 21%; increased innovation 20%; high quality of service 19%; other 11% (Seader, 2002).

Public-private partnerships exist in many sizes and shapes. They range from large to small scale, work on solving many different problems, and affect billions of people. While their effect cannot be compared, the following two examples show how diverse public-private partnerships are. In 2003 the Department of Energy awarded \$20M to public-private partnerships for technology research and development for industrial materials ([www.oit.doe.gov/cfm/fullarticle.cfm/id=789](http://www.oit.doe.gov/cfm/fullarticle.cfm/id=789)). A very different example comes from Dr. Rutherford, a professor at Southwest Missouri State University. He is a double amputee from a landmine accident. He argues public-private partnerships are essential for helping survivors. The U.S. Department of State partnered with a variety of NGOs to include survivor assistance, "medical care, access to

prosthetics, wheelchairs, social and economic reintegration; psychological and peer support; accident prevention programs; and legal and advisory services” (White and Rutherford, 1998). The examples of all the different projects public-private partnerships are tackling right now in this country and all over the world are too numerous to name. While public-private partnerships have been in existence for over 100 years in the United States, their functionality and practicality continue to grow.

Public-private partnerships are especially useful when a large problem is not being taken care of by traditional means. For example, in education, early childhood education is not addressed in our standard public school system serving grades k-12. Usually, a public-private partnership will work on a widespread issue extending the boundaries of a specific community, but the community will have a specific version of the problem that makes it unique. While early education is a widespread problem, it will have different nuances in each area. For instance, in a certain demographic region, family members may be the predominant source of early childhood education. Those family members may speak English as a second language. Those families will enroll their children in English-speaking schools for kindergarten thus creating the problem of children who do not understand the language or the level of education required to start kindergarten. Public-private partnerships often come about because the problem makes the community look bad or has negative consequences. Continuing with the early childhood education issue, if children are not prepared for school (i.e. they do not know the language well, are unfamiliar with the alphabet or reading,



or have not been exposed to the prerequisites), then the school will have to take extra time to work with them which may cause that school to fall behind and be labeled as underachieving compared to another district. Low-performing schools generally do not attract families with children to move into those communities. The effect of these problems is extensive. The stakeholders in public-private partnerships are often numerous. In issues of early childhood education the stakeholders could include the schools, children, parents, day care providers, special education personnel, the local government, Department of Education, real estate brokers, local businesses and many more.

Gray (1989) warns, however, although many stakeholders share common problems, it does not mean establishing a common agenda or goal is simple. Their motivation for joining may be different as well as their stake. Each stakeholder will have to understand the other's position. Frustration may occur because public and private entities do things differently, have different rules and constraints. All of these issues take time and can lead to mistrust. Because of this, communication is central to collaborative efforts including public-private partnerships.

## COMMUNICATON AND COLLABORATION

While many scholars have set the stage as to why collaboration and public/private partnerships are needed in today's world, the term collaboration is used in many ways outside of scholarly work. In fact, it has become such an overused word, it can mean everything from working side by side with someone to truly understanding another's position and background in order to create the

best solution to a problem. People's definitions of collaboration differ in academia, business, and everyday use. Further, definitions depend on specific disciplines and even differ within organizational communication. Likewise, the definitions depend on the audience and purpose of using the term in non-scholarly settings. Some people may be using the term collaboration because it is popular, it gets them noticed for funding, or it is trendy. People call lots of things collaboration and public/private partnerships. People think differently about collaboration and the relationship it has to communication. While each definition has merits and shortcomings, what is initially important for this study is one piece of collaboration right now. I am trying to understand how people think about communication in relation to collaboration. While they may agree at a very basic level collaboration means people come together to work on solving a problem, they do not necessarily associate collaboration with communication. My concern is what the word collaboration means to people and how it relates to communication.

Wood and Gray (1991) in two special issues of the *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* draw out commonalities from nine articles about collaboration. Regardless of the theoretical background scholars used to approach writing about collaboration, all conceded it was an interactive process, and thereby centralized the importance of the communication process in collaboration. In order to represent their various interests, explain all of the different facets to a problem, and work out creative solutions, people must communicate. This may seem too obvious to mention. Collaborations make use of a wide variety of

communication means. Some collaborations hold face-to-face meetings, others rely on technology such as a tele/video conferencing and others are internet based where a large amount of information can be accessed and people can email or post messages to the site. Whatever the mode of communication is, it is central to participants who come together in collaboration.

Collaboration implies normative things; it is quite different from more traditional ways of organizing or even group or teams. Communication within collaboration takes on those same normative hopes and expectations of collaboration itself. "The success of participation is directly linked to the quality and character of communication" (Russell, 1997; Cheney, et al, 1997; Cheney, 1995 in Deetz and Brown, 2003). However, extant literature does not tell us how people in real collaborative situations think they should communicate. We have lots of descriptions of collaboration and advice to do it better in scholarly literature, but how people reason through their role is oddly absent.

Chapter three will review the literature on descriptive and instructive studies of communication and collaboration. The purpose of this paper is to explore something missing in extant literature. What is left out is the larger worldviews that people have, which influence their communication choices. This idea of communication not being isolated but related to larger ideas about the world is not theoretical or situated; it is oddly concrete and abstract at the same time. People's worldviews say what they should do in all situations, yet the scholarly work out there does not give any account of people's worldviews, nor how they relate them to real life situations. This is an important piece of

understanding communication and collaboration. For example, if I tell them in our interviews to use self- disclosure to reveal how they think about communication, but it runs to counter to their larger worldview of communication, I will not reach an understanding. I will have to observe their interactions in order to build a bigger and fuller story about their stance on communication. The tie between human choices and larger worldviews is oddly absent and culturally disconnected.

A tremendous amount of information is out there about collaboration and communication. Specific attention has been paid to the processes people use. Extant works tend to be general; the descriptions are broad and the instructions are overarching. They do not show the mechanisms by which people enact these pieces of advice. The micro level is largely ignored. People's views on how communication in collaboration works and how it is supposed to work are missing. The other part ignored are their larger belief systems of communication. Therefore, we do not understand how they process advice in light of their larger belief systems we ignore. These are real people who come into a collaborative situation with a whole set of communication ideas that receive little attention. Then, we try to train them on collaborative processes. We cannot know about how people make choices of communication within collaborations without understanding the larger belief system of collaboration they have. We do not know how they think about their own communication and what the consequences are of these individual ideas coming together in a real life collaborative situation. People's ideals of communication invoke notions of communication theory. They

come from ideas about how communication works, who a person is and what it means to be human. People's preferences are organized and powerful, even if they do not think of them that way.

If we do not understand how communication works according to the people involved in collaboration, we are unable to understand how collaboration works. When people engage in a collaborative role they have their own concepts of how communication works, what is good and bad communication when they walk in the door. We have all been a part of a meeting where one person has no trouble interrupting others whenever he or she has something to say and another person would never consider doing such a thing. Or when someone challenges a proposal in a vehement way, others are deeply offended by that type of interaction. Some people think it is important to tell all the people in the meeting exactly what their point is, while others will wait until after the meeting and have "coffee talk" with the other meeting attendees and share their views then. While both sides of these examples are simple and common ways of communicating, they have effects on the meeting. Heath and Sias (1999) explain how a vice president in the banking industry who participated in the juvenile delinquency community collaboration had military training and familiarity with hierarchical structures. He was totally frustrated at how long the process took to make a decision within the collaboration. How does that ingrained notion of what communication is supposed to do play out for the collaboration? What are the implications of people's native views of communication? How does the group

decide which norms to invoke and what are the ramifications of choosing one norm over another?

### SPECIFICS OF THIS STUDY

This dissertation incorporates an organizational communication perspective. It will explore native ideas and enacted preferences of communication and their implications. This area of study is important because we all have ideas about how communication works and what it is supposed to do. We all judge communication. What we do not know as much about is how (1) preference tensions are inherent and problematic in our every day lives, (2) the preferences enacted by organizational members have profound affects on organizational life, and (3) the growing complexity of today's problems require collaboration.

For the purposes of this paper, the enacted preferences or choices of communication will be the focus. From looking at how people think they should talk, we can then move to how they do talk and then to the implications of talking the way they do. If participants enact a preference of communication for sharing their different positions, the implication may be that no common goal is created. If leadership stresses their agenda, the implication may be lack of buy-in from other workers, the inability for workers to ask questions and clarify the leadership's points or possibly challenge the validity of their plan. Therefore, people's normative preferences of communication effect collaboration. We can explore this idea by determining how preferences are reproduced in communication.

Within the context of public-private partnerships, I want to see how the process of collaboration works. I want to understand how and why they espouse certain ideals of communication, what specific ideals of communication are embedded in their talk, and how their communication affects the collaboration in which they are engaged. In order to conduct this study, I will analyze both discourse from individual collaborative members during interviews with regard to the preferences they espouse the group holds as well as discourse from collaborative meetings where communicated preferences become visible. I will explore how the members make sense of the multiple perspectives of the collaborative group and how they negotiate being a part of a public-private partnership. I will look at how the choices they make and the preferences embedded in those choices implicates what happens within that collaboration.

#### OVERVIEW OF THIS DISSERTATION

Chapter 2 of this dissertation is more theoretical in nature. It explains how preferences are a key part of communication and focuses on preferences within the process of communication rather than the content of the communication. Next, it defines the different levels of preferences within communication, specifically addressing the difference between espoused and embedded preferences. Finally, this chapter proposes a heuristic that organizes five different interrelated principles of communication that serve as worldviews. If we understand these overarching resources, we may better understand where people draw their normative expectations about what ideals of communication should look like.

Chapter 3 provides examples of how scholars have accounted for preferences of communication and analyzed them in specific contexts. Through their studies we can see how people evoke normative notions in their communication practices. This chapter will analyze examples of collaborations where people have explicitly espoused preferences. Also, it will look at examples of collaborations where scholars have extracted ideals of communication from people's interactions and responses in interviews. Then, it will explore the consequences of enacted preferences of communication in different groups. These examples will lead to specific questions that this study wishes to explore.

Chapter 4 presents the methods of data collection and analysis supporting the acquisition of data needed to answer the questions proposed. In order to understand how people within a public-private partnership make sense of their role, including their communication, I need to get to know those participants, talk to them formally and informally and ask them what they think. Also, I need to record their interactions to be able to extract preferences of communication from their talk and follow the group long enough to determine how some of their decisions play out. One-on-one interviews and collaborative meetings are the sites for empirically grounding research claims.

Chapter 5 delves into the specifics of the public-private partnership being studied. It describes the site, explains why and how it was formed, who participates within it, how their meetings look, and provides some specifics about some of the major players and projects they are working on.



Chapter 6 provides the results of my analysis of interviews and offers three different preferences of communication that emerged from the data. These are common ways members share of judging communication. The preferences point to larger, overarching theories of how people think about communication and are part of the interrelated principles of the proposed heuristic. Some correlations existed in the data such as matching the level of involvement of a person with their preference of communication.

Chapter 7 provides a description of talk within a collaborative process, specifically partnership meetings. While the same preferences were found in interviews and meetings, they have different consequences and exist in different forms. The meetings challenged some normative expectations of how communication works within collaborations.

Chapter 8 presents the overall results of the study as well as conclusions, limitations and implications for further research.

## CHAPTER 2: PREFERENCES OF COMMUNICATION

People frequently judge communication as being good or bad. We all have ideas about how communication should function. They come from a variety of places. Some judgments come from whether or not people follow norms. We know when a friend calls who needs to vent about his or her day, we are supposed to listen intently and not interrupt the friend as he or she shares. But other judgments come from larger concepts. For example, people make normative judgments about how one participates in a democracy. Their way of talking carries theoretical notions of what it means to be democratic. It may mean free speech, majority vote, representation, etc. These normative notions come from a variety of sources. An introductory communication theory book chapter on expectancy violations theory provides an illustration. "For example, moderate to prolonged eye contact in Western cultures usually communicates awareness, interest, affection and trust" (Burgoon, 2000, p. 85). Another place we learn ubiquitous communication preferences is from self-help material. In her team-building book Harrington-Mackin (1994) suggested in order to explain yourself to team members and communicate what you expect of them you should do, "more talking, asking questions, [and] working together on the businesses' problems" (p. 26). Other normative notions of communication can be found in literature describing real practices found in every day life. For example, Tracy and Craig (2003) provide a way of extracting sets of beliefs about communication and ideals from people's usages of certain terms in school board meetings. Good

communication adapts to changing situations. The norm is in place for us to judge what is good and bad.

People's ideas about the way they should communicate are the focus of this study. My attention is paid to the process by which they are communicating. Several different levels of preferences influence this process. Sometimes people come right out and say what their preferences of communication are. For example, some of the school board members from the Tracy and Craig (2003) study argued democracy existed in the form of inclusion, openness, respect and cooperation. These are explicit ways of conveying one's preferences of communication. On the other hand, if people in a meeting agree one of their ground rules is to follow democratic processes, each person will think about what it means to communicate democratically a bit differently. Instead of the person explicitly saying what they espouse is good, democratic communication, a researcher can note preferences in that person's talk. The following section explains the difference between these levels of communication.

#### ESPOUSED AND EMBEDDED PREFERENCES

Preferences of communication are indicated in people's talk; the way they choose something over another. Organizational members explicitly identify espoused preferences of communication. These are process rules intended to explicitly guide the group's communication. For example, the members of the women's shelter in Ashcraft's (2001) study used ethical communication. Ethical communication implies a specific set of practices the group chose to follow. A

different level of preference exists under the surface, when people are not so explicit.

Embedded preferences of communication are seen in the choices people make when they talk. Embedded preferences can be inferred by the way people communicate. Of note is that people's preferences, what they think ought to be, are often not what is practiced or enacted in the way they live. Underlying embedded choices do not have to be intentional or even subconscious, consider them more as motifs than motives in talk. This disconnect is identified as the gap between espoused and embedded values.

Often when we think about preferences, we think in psychological terms. We try to understand people's motivations for their preferences. This study is only concerned with their preferences of communication. Preferences found in explicit communication are called explicit such as a person telling a researcher, "We think it is most important to ensure representation in our group discussions." These people carry explicit preferences of communication if they tell you what communication practices they will use to ensure their idea of good communication is achieved, such as representation. Preferences inherent in actual processes are called embedded and can be seen through interaction observation. These choices in terms eliminate the confusion that explicit preferences are communicated and embedded preferences do not have anything to do with communication, but are behavioral. Choices people profess to make as well as those seen in their communication processes are oriented preferences on the espoused and embedded levels.

For example, when people stand in line, they actualize a practice that implicates the preferences of order over disorder and also first come first served (Deetz, 1992). They may not necessarily believe in the idea of first come first served, but their practice shows that they are living by it at that particular time. Part of the reason for the gap between espoused and embedded preferences is our normalized way of ignoring the deep reasoning behind practices. For example, the act of standing in line works against a distributed justice such as needy people should get something. Perhaps a single parent who works two jobs can only go to the grocery store at 5:00 p.m. between jobs. The less time he or she spends in line is more of the 20 minutes a day that parent is able to spend with his or her child between jobs. On the other hand, a person who won the lottery and is independently wealthy just happened to be standing in line at the grocery store at the same time ahead of the single parent. If the wealthy person knew the circumstances of the single parent, he or she might choose to enact different preferences and let the single parent go ahead, yet usually we do not know the personal situations of strangers in line. So the person with no time constraints actually takes the single parent away from the little time he or she has with the child.

The preferences embedded in people's actions are indicative of much more than a snap decision. For example, order is better than disorder is not isolated but a small part of how people think society should work. Likewise, standing in line becomes an exemplar of much larger notions of government. For example, other societies work more chaotically than ours. First come first served

enacts a preference over other ideas such as needy people go first. Yet a standard way of thinking about the act of standing in line is that it appears to be neutral. It buries behind it a whole set of things such as order over disorder, first come first served, waiting one's turn, the distribution of free time, and others. Many possibilities exist for contradiction between what people espouse and what they practice. The normative notion that hard work gets rewards disadvantages people who work hard under the notion of first come first served. Remember the single parent example above. While his or her purpose was to spend as little time as possible away from his or her child yet also make enough money to support the child, the act of standing in line facilitated the failure of accomplishing that purpose. We rarely dig deeply into our practices to extrapolate what implications are made from them. If we treat talk as a practice and we dig deeply into it, we can identify embedded preferences that we are living by perhaps unintentionally.

Because I have no privileged access to anything beneath their talk, I look at people's talk in meetings and during interviews. I can make sense of the way they talk by identifying the preferences that seem to structure it. I try to build an underlying set of patterns that make sense. Their talk is an activity they perform, much like standing in line, and may not necessarily be what they mean. Their preferences are not necessarily ideals of communication as that implies the perfect or "ideal" way of communicating. I pay attention to the gap that might exist between their espoused and embedded preferences of communication. For example, someone may espouse a preference for equal turn taking during

meetings, yet when a meeting is underway and the mode is information giving, they may not object.

One way to understand preferences of communication is to look at what kind of communication theories would make sense for these choices. These preferences are based in larger ways of communicating. Individuals probably could not articulate these theories anymore than they could articulate the grammar they use in forming sentences. But this study explores larger notions of what the theory implies. They come from ideas about how communication works, who a person is and what it means to be human. People's preferences are organized and powerful, even if they do not think of them that way. Scholars have struggled to try to define major theories or views of communication that are connected to these assumptions about life. For example, Carey (1989) suggests there are two views of communication, one is a transmission view and the other is cultural. Likewise, Peters (1999) explains the difference between two options, dialogue and dissemination. In reading current literature, I have identified five interrelated principles that arise out of worldviews. These are conceivable ways different groups of people might think through communication. Purposefully, I avoided the polarity of many discussions about communication theory; such as it is one way or another. I think more texture exists; it is not simply this or that. These principles are devices to be able to sort out something difficult to see. They are related choices of communication that spring from a certain way of looking at the world, understanding people and interaction. The interrelated principles are not strict categories, which may hinder their complexity, but they are families of

overarching preferences that can sensitize us to the different ways people idealize communication. If we understand worldviews, we can begin to see how people think communication should work. The reverse is also true. If we understand how people think about choices of communication we can see their larger assumptions about the world that make them judge what communication is good and bad and why. The five interrelated principles I propose comprise a heuristic that is coherent and displays logical bodies of resources. They closely resemble how extant literature breaks ideals apart. For example, with regard to democracy Barber (1984) argues for distinctly different threads of looking at the world embedded with distinct ideals: authoritative, juridicial, pluralist, unitary and strong democracy (p. 140-151). I draw heavily on Barber's threads in this heuristic.

These interrelated principles enable us to compare similar value premises about communication including the basic nature of people, how theories develop, and how we come to know the world and share it with others. The principles capture a way of thinking about how reality is defined, the role of personal experience, what knowledge is and how it relates to the world. Likenesses on these ways of looking at the world interrelate.

Whenever people choose a certain way of communicating over another, such as asking for more participation, an implication made from their preference ties back to a larger set of beliefs about communication. For example, why did they choose participation? Is it a preference of participation and representation, creativity in decision- making, additional information, or something else?



People's preference for participation could be filled in by any of the five interrelated principles proposed in the heuristic or another yet to be identified. Each of these interrelated principles forms a constellation, which groups similar ways of judging communication. The other preferences of communication that make up the constellation may help us better understand the larger view of what their preferences implicate. Again if we understand how people think about communication, we can understand how they judge whether an interaction is good or bad and bring out the consequences their choices have on their endeavors. Likewise, if we understand their worldviews, we can see how their preferences of communication help or hinder them from achieving that purpose.

The heuristic helps us understand people's worldview through their communication. We can understand questions such as how do people think communication should work? In what way do we claim an example of communication as good or bad? Where did those notions come from? How is the communication authentic to other interrelated principles? What preferences are associated with the way they think the world works that naturally flow into the way they think about communication?

The way these interrelated principles are separated is somewhat arbitrary. For the purposes of this paper, extant literature on the preferences of communication informed the categories. They reflect the organizational world and the trends within it. This is not to say that the interrelated principles are the best possible split, or that the preferences do not overlap or include every conceivable way of looking at the world of communication. Instead, the heuristic

represents one way of dividing out overarching preferences and choices that relate to each other and inform communication choices. My final three interrelated principles, liberal democracy, unitary and strong democracy preferences of communication come almost exclusively from Barber (1984). All of the interrelated principles are coherent bodies of resources from which choices of communication flow regarding a wide variety of topics. The heuristic is a tool organizing these sets of coherent choices about communication into interrelated principles, which may help us build a larger picture of people's talk and their assumptions of how they look at the world.

I will draw on theories about democracy, dialogue, and collaboration in order to explain these interrelated principles. I will provide a description of each of these principles, point out their overarching preferences, and show the motif for each of them. The interrelated principles are: rational/argumentative/informative, humanistic psychological, liberal democratic, unitary, and strong democracy.

#### *Rational/Argumentative/Information*

Carey (1989) called the view of communication from this cluster of preferences the transmission view. He calls it the "commonest" view and argues that it is characterized by words such as "imparting," "sending," "transmitting," or "giving information to others" (p. 15). He explained that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the movement of goods and people were considered the same as the movement of information and both were labeled "communication" (p. 15). Carey argues that the core of the transmission view of communication is the "transmission of signals or messages over distance for the purpose of control" (p. 15).

Additionally, he argued that the primary reason behind this view of communication was religious. He explains that spreading the Christian message to the new world was the purpose of not only the explorers, but also the telegraph and the railroad. "Communication was viewed as a process and a technology that would sometimes for religious purposes, spread, transmit, and disseminate knowledge, ideas, and information farther and faster with the goal of controlling space and people" (p. 17).

Yet within this interrelated principle, communication in Carey's linear sense is also linked to rationality. The purpose of being rational is to find the truth. The motif of this interrelated principle of preferences is dissemination. The assumption is knowledge exists out there somewhere and the purpose of communication is to share and transmit that knowledge to others. This position assumes if we engage in free and open debate, the truth will eventually emerge. This belief structure is essentially the foundation of our field. It envisions the role of communication as one to inform and persuade, and supports the premise that adhering to the process will ensure truth is reached.

A central place to find this type of communication is in a public speaking manual or textbook. Students are taught that the two main types of speeches are to inform and persuade. When giving a speech, the speaker must make certain moves ensuring audience involvement such as humor, shock, storytelling, or establishing common ground. Since traditional speeches do not encourage audience members to interrupt during the speech, ask questions, seek clarification, etc. the speech serves to convey only what the speaker chooses. Speakers must

pay attention to their ethos, ensuring their credentials are being “bought” by the audience. They are advised to use non-technical terms, effective transitions, signal the end of their speech and summarize their important points.

Neither in an informative speech, nor in a persuasive speech does anyone other than the speaker get to contribute to what is being presented. In a persuasive speech, speakers are taught to consider not only their own ethos, which they cater to as they establish common ground, build sincerity toward their audience, and compliment their audience, but also the pathos of the audience and the logos of their argument. It is the role of the speaker to line up facts, give proper credit to contributors and present a well-rounded argument to the audience. If a question and answer period follows the speech, some opportunity is provided for the audience to clarify points and interact with the speaker (O'Connor, 1997).

This is most clearly the “every day” way of thinking about how communication is supposed to work. It is the most influential, reoccurring way that we talk about communication in our society. Reddy's (1970) notion of the conduit metaphor is considered a dominant way people think about communication. Many people consider communication good if it is transmitted effectively and persuasive. In our own field Smith (1970) argued the “fallacy of the communication breakdown,” or the notion that meaning is not transmitted or traded, but created between people. Even the unforgettable line from “Cool Hand Luke,” a 1967 film, illustrates how prolific the notion is of good communication as an understood transmission. In the movie, the prison captain said to Luke,

“What we’ve got here is a failure to communicate.” We often associate this transmission notion of communication as producing an effective argument.

Those who employ argumentative/rational/informative communication often do so in order to apply leverage to an interactive situation. Some of the assumptions of the argumentative strategy are that good communication influences people, makes true claims, strikes a cord with a particular audience, and is memorable. Others believe this traditional and every day way of communicating has other outcomes.

Tannen’s (1998) *Argument Culture* posits that our society frames every issue as a debate, battle or war. She provides several examples of our culture’s seemingly innate criticism, contentiousness, and antagonism. Additionally, she shows how we have become obsessed with winning vs. losing, right vs. wrong, pushing our own agenda vs. listening, and competing vs. cooperating, ignoring a huge gray area in between the two sides. Her cultural examples pervade politics, academia, the courtroom, gender clashes, and journalism. Tannen’s (1998) critique illustrates a different belief, one neither argumentative nor rational, but more emotional and humanistic.

#### *Humanistic Psychological*

The humanistic psychology influence, largely credited to Maslow (1970, 1973) and Rogers (1965, 1969, 1980) took the principles and values associated with humanistic psychology and applied it to the way we interact with one another. Scholars such as Stewart (1973) showed us how this influence affected communication. The importance of this movement came about in the 1960s

partially as a response to the argumentative/rational/informative view of communication. Scholars felt a key part of what communication was about was missing from this earlier thinking. They found it problematic to view communication solely on rationality and thought relationships, listening and disclosure were more important ideals. This new view made a statement about the importance of emotion and experience. They argued that knowledge and truth reside in people; it is not something that floats around somewhere. Those who follow this school of thought emphasize the dignity and worth of humans. The motive of humanistic psychological communication is toward human understanding.

Stewart's (1982) description of what makes people different from objects and hence communication between people so much different than noninterpersonal communication follows this humanistic psychological line of thinking. He provides five points:

Each person is a unique, noninterchangeable part of the communication situation; persons are choosers who are free to act, not just react to the conditions they're in; a person is more than just an amalgamation of observable, measurable elements, he or she is always experiencing feelings or emotions; persons are of value just because they are persons...; persons are reflective...(p. 19).

The assumption is that all human beings are essentially the same at the core, after we peel back the layers. A prevalent way of thinking in many "alternative" organizations, those influenced by this cluster are interested in the development and potential inherent in every person. They believe all humans are basically creative and behave intentionally. They place centrality on personal

experience and holistic and tacit ways of knowing. They emphasize individual choice and responsibility and use the “whole person” concept to theorize the nature of what it means to be human in the world. Humanistic psychology values personal ideals, intellectual honesty, respecting other’s rights, honoring their differences and diversity as well as self-actualization.

Deetz and Simpson’s (2004) discussion of the dominant positions on dialogue name the earliest notion of dialogue the liberal humanist perspective, which has the same preferences as the humanistic psychological interrelated principles of preferences of communication. They explain that this view of dialogue is “rooted in notions of internally located meaning” (p. 141) and that it is “founded on principles of understanding, empathy, and active listening” (p. 141).

Arnett (1981) distinguished this view of dialogue, the “humanistic psychological dialogue of Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers” from the “phenomenological dialogue of Martin Buber and Maurice Friedman” (p. 201). The first view influenced the ideals of communication by relying on a person’s gut feelings or what Roger’s called “organismic impulses” (p. 119). This view argues that the psyche of each individual was most important; every person should develop him or herself without pressure from anyone else vs. the second view, which concentrated less on what was within a person and more on what went on between people.

Similarly, Bohm (1996) distinguished between discussion and dialogue noting dialogue involves trust, allows meaning to be shared, requires an awareness of the assumptions we make about other people and what they say, and

both their and our feelings. Bohm considers dialogue “for people to realize what is on each other’s minds without coming to any conclusions or judgments” (p. 21). He argues we have to treat other participants of dialogue as colleagues. After Bohm made this distinction, Isaacs and Senge followed up on his notion.

Isaacs, the director of the Dialogue Project at MIT’s Organizational Learning Center, and Senge who was also involved in the project discussed the stages of dialogue in team settings. These steps reflect a humanistic psychological influence. Isaacs (1993) explained in the beginning of an interaction people need to learn how to ask questions and find out why other people are thinking a certain way. Then he showed how people move from defending their own points of view or criticizing others into listening. He relates how this is a frustrating time because people’s thoughts are often fragmented and difficult to make coherent. Then, people begin to understand each other and share meaning and this too can be frustrating because people have their horizons broadened and they realize there are so many more facets to the world they had previously accepted. Finally, discipline and collective trust makes it possible for people to understand, but they may be frustrated by inadequate words to communicate. Even so, in his estimation, the process, if followed through, exhibits a steadfast commitment to valuing human understanding.

Senge’s (1990) *Fifth Discipline* came out of his experience with the MIT Dialogue project and took the business world by storm. It was one of the hottest books out promising a new and different way of building a successful business. He called systems thinking the fifth discipline because he felt it was the



framework upon which complexity, globalization and dynamism were built. The other four disciplines capture humanistic psychological ideals: personal mastery, mental models, shared vision and team learning. Senge (1990) differentiates between dialogue and discussion. He specifies dialogue as the free and creative exploration of complex and subtle issues, a deep “listening” to one another and suspending of one’s views. He contrasts dialogue as discussion where different views are presented and defended. Dialogue, he argues, is a search for the best view to support decisions that must be made at a particular time. Senge’s (1990) book serves to remind us that the humanist psychological perspective is an every day ideal of thinking about communication that is reproduced in our lives and work.

Ashcraft’s (2001) study of SAFE, an organization by and for women, espoused ideals traced to the humanistic psychological interrelated principles. With a feminist framework around taking care of women and children who are victims of violence as well as educating people about domestic violence, SAFE members used “ethical communication” to facilitate empowering those whose voices had been lost in traditional organizations. Their mission focused on alternative ways of resolving conflict with a more “gentle, peaceful path toward social change, allegedly derived from women’s experience” (p. 89-90).

Peters (1999) exemplifies the struggle between argumentative/rational/informative preferences of communication and humanistic psychological preferences of communication in that he toggles back and forth between holding out some importance for finding the absolute truth and not

giving in completely to feeling and emotion. His work shows us how the concept of dialogue has been a competing version of communication for a long time. He points out two different notions of communication: the humanistic approach concerned with self-expression and the scientific worldview aimed at discovering the truth.

As the humanistic psychological movement grew, the motive shifted from finding the absolute truth to human understanding. This battle from the 60s did not capture all possible sides, but only two options of overarching ways of looking at the world. We see some of the other options emerging in more recent work including not only liberal democracy, but also unitary and strong democracy.

### *Unitary*

As mentioned before, the split between the rational/argumentative/information view of preferences and the humanistic psychological perspective do not represent the only two resources available. Another manifestation that grew out of the notion that communication was more than rational thought aimed at the truth, was the unitary family of choices. Thinking every person had a similar core that could be revealed under many layers changed to the external culture surrounding us arises our sense of commonality.

The Quakers provide a strong example of communitarian ideals. In the early 1600s George Fox helped to initiate this movement in England. They maintained a strict way of life and found it necessary by 1652 to set up meetings

of Friends to deal with pressing topics. Quakers named their unique culture specifying a clearly defined way of life with a spiritual basis affecting every aspect of it. The community meeting and a school are often the center of their existence. Woolman (late 1700s) said, "Here we have a prospect of one common interest, from which our own is inseparable, that to turn all the treasures we possess into the channel of Universal Love becomes the business of our lives" (p. [www/Evanston/quaker.org](http://www.Evanston/quaker.org)). Quakers place a great deal of import on yearly meetings and group meetings. They consider communication as a key facet that keeps them together, different from those on the outside, yet all working toward their common goals and preserving their way of life.

A similar cultural bond, Indian reservations illustrate another community-based way of life. Medicine (1979) explains how different dialects of different Native American languages (she discusses Lakota and Dakota) are used depending on geographical location and purpose of the communication. Maintaining their native languages has been a struggle for many Native Americans. Some speak only English now, while others speak only Lakota. Medicine (1979) also provides examples of mixtures of the two languages such as "baby-la" for little baby or "sister-mi-ta-wa-ki" for my sister (p. 377). Regardless of the language, however, Native American culture is reflected in communication. For example, if someone says, "I want you to speak (or talk) to me," this request is a sign of needing "guidance, advice, reassurance, or wishes help in a decision-making or a stressful situation" (p. 378). The person to whom the request is made takes the role as the listener. The listener may point out the individual's social

role, some reasons for them feeling the way they do, or some possible solutions. Yet individual autonomy is of tremendous value to Native Americans and the self-actualizing process necessary to reach that autonomy is part of the process.

While cultural commonality is one way to bring people together, other bonds also motivate unitary values. As Barber (1984) explains, the motive for unitary democracy is consensus. "Democracy in the unitary mode resolves conflict in the absence of an independent ground through community consensus as defined by the identification of individuals and their interests with a symbolic collectivity and its interests" (p. 149). Action exists as organic, communal and unanimous. The self must be abandoned for the group. Individualism is subsumed by the collective; the personal is of less importance than the public. As the self disappears, the autonomous whole becomes that which individuals identify with and the communal will becomes the decision-maker. The government, however, remains centralized. Barber acknowledges that the unitary system has worked well in small groups where ideals such as equality and citizenship may have been missing. "...A community held together by bonds as powerful as those afforded by civil religion, national chauvanism, tribal kinship, or any other form of unattenuated consensualism would seem to lean toward a unitary rather than a strong form of democracy and to be achieving its cohesion at the expense of individual autonomy, social pluralism, and participatory activity" (Barber, 1984, p. 242).

The communitarian movement belongs in this set of interrelated principles. Although a great deal of consternation seems to exist with the label

“communitarian,” i.e. MacIntyre, commonly classified as a communitarian specifically rejected this labeling (1995), political philosophers such as Taylor (1989), Sandel (1982), and Walzer (1983) rallied behind the idea of a common good. The newest post-1990 communitarian platform includes a host of scholars from many disciplines. Their concern lies “with the balance between social forces and the person, between community and autonomy, between the common good and liberty, between individual rights and social responsibilities” (Etzioni, 1998, p. x).

Communitarians believe that in order to preserve individual rights a civil society must be actively maintained; citizens must have self-respect and respect for others; responsibilities both personal and civic must be attended to; people must be aware of their own rights and other’s; and self-government and governing skills must be developed (preamble to the Responsive Communitarian Platform). Communitarians value childcare, moral education, moral agency, taking care of one another, treating people with respect, performing community service, being informed, voting, and paying taxes. “Respect and uphold society’s moral order as you would have society respect and uphold your autonomy to live a full life” (Etzioni, 1996, p.xviii).

This perspective envisions a balance between preserving individual rights and maintaining institutions of civil society. The George Washington University Institute for Communitarian Policy Studies states that the communitarian perspective does not dictate particular policies, but instead requires attention to

the social side of human nature, a concept that is frequently left out of contemporary policy debates ([www.gwu.edu/~icps/rights.html](http://www.gwu.edu/~icps/rights.html)).

Bellah (1995/6) argued that the idea of community is often misunderstood because it invokes the German idea of *Gemeinschaft*, or small-scale, face-to-face groups and conceptualizes society as based on a social contract. He wrote, however, communitarians believe ideas exist on continuums; community can mean a larger scale group; one that will have basic shared values and goals. "A good community is one in which there is argument, even conflict, about the meaning of the shared values and goals, and certainly about how they will be actualized in everyday life" (p. 2). He argued that the traditional dichotomy between Republicans and Democrats ignores the lifeworld ( a term taken from Habermas) that includes where we interact, deliberate, agree on norms and pursue a common action that creates a good life for us.

The unitary cluster of ideals looks to external influences that bring people together in commonality. These include bonds built from culture, religion, or a common way of looking at the world and how people should live within it. A different set of interrelated principles most prevalent in our country right now is the liberal democratic preferences.

### *Liberal Democracy*

Liberal democracy has been used to describe the nature of politics in the United States. It is the most institutionalized school of thought with an emphasis on preserving an individual's human rights and the right to pursue his or her own ends within a representative democracy that assures social and political equality.

Liberal democracy assumes a shared set of values and emphasizes representation, equal say, and freedom of speech. Its motif is representation. Liberal democracy is operationalized in state institutions, the bill of rights and election processes (Deetz, 1992, p. 146). Liberal democracy largely pulls from the rational/argumentative/information set of interrelated principles. For example, rational choice models are used for decision-making within the liberal democratic paradigm. However, it differs in the belief that the absolute truth cannot be known so representation ensures everyone at least has an equal say of his or her opinion.

Liberal democracy has shown its strength over time. It has been historically successful serving people. Its politics revolve around protecting autonomous individuals' rights. Many have described it as an attractive, straightforward and traceable notion. Also, liberal democracy has a common appeal to all individuals who wish to keep their rights intact. As long as rights are preserved, people will support its principles. Barber (1984) delves into the framework around liberal democracy and Deetz (1992) shows us how those principles become preferences of communication.

Barber (1984) described liberal democracy as thin democracy. He argued liberal democracy centered on the individual too much to be democratic. "It is concerned more to promote individual liberty than to secure public justice, to advance interests rather than to discover goods, and to keep men safely apart rather than to bring them fruitfully together" (p. 4). Therefore, according to Barber, liberal democracy protects individual's rights, but cannot project against that which would harm a community. Barber traces three types of liberal

democracy: anarchist, realist, and minimalist and explains that while each one contradicts the other, they place conflict at the center of their focus. The anarchist believes individuals should be independent, autonomous, separate and free. They are conflict-denying. The realist is concerned with individual rights just as the anarchist but he or she also supports the legislative system and power as a means of supporting that individual's rights. They are conflict-repressing. The minimalist sees politics as necessary to keep people in check since they are on their own accord too competitive and too distrustful. "Hence, minimalism promotes a politics of toleration in which every interaction is hedged with temperance, every abdication of personal liberty is circumscribed by reservations, every grant of authority is hemmed in with guaranteed rights, and every surrender of privacy is safeguarded with limits" (p. 16). They are conflict-tolerating. Barber explains that these three stances leave liberal democracy in a characteristic dilemma where "the natural condition jeopardizes individual man's potential freedom while the state endangers his actual freedom" (p.21). He points out that favoring the individual over the community makes it virtually impossible for citizenship, participation, public goods, or civic virtue to flourish.

Barber (1984) traces liberal democracy's model of reasoning. First, liberal democracy is based on atomism or the notion that "humans are separate, integral, self-contained, unitary particles or atoms...the human perspective is of...the isolated individual One" (p.33). With this as a foundation, concepts such as "interdependence, mutualism, cooperation, fellowship, fraternity, community and citizenship" (p.34-35) are less likely. Second, he argues that liberal democratic



theory assumes “concepts, values, standards and ends of political life” (p. 46) can all be derived from one truth. Instead of devising a political theory that changed with the times, theorists clung to a certainty or absolute knowledge. Barber attributes autonomous reason as liberal democracy’s chief weapon against traditional authority. The assumption that individuals can reason and determine morals on their own was enough to justify men coming together to create the Constitution. Their challenge was to make their lives and politics fit within an absolute truth.

Third, Barber argues the psychological frame upon which liberal democracy is built is the alienation of man; the fact that he is alone. This has been portrayed as liberation with praise for solitude and privacy, while community has become a symbol of slavery. The quest for property and power outweighs a person’s desire to be social. Ensuring individual rights and private property has trumped any engagement in a public life.

When liberal democratic theory is applied to preferences of communication, it implies talk can be a route to decision-making. However, as Deetz (2000) notes, “with the failure of good talk and good political processes, contemporary society evidences the gradual replacement of discussion with calculation...market economy rather than the public sphere, or opinion polls rather than the pursuit of joint commitment” (p. 2). He traces the liberal democratic impetus behind a number of new community programs designed to increase the number of different places people can speak their mind, debate and

information sharing can occur, but points out that this does not mean a person's voice is heard.

Barber (1984) blames the promise of representation for liberal democracy's failure. "The representative principle steals from individuals the ultimate responsibility for their values, beliefs, and actions" (p.145). He explains how once we give up our direct hand in politics so someone can represent us, we give up our self-government and autonomy. And if we give up our common action, we give up our freedom. According to Barber, liberal democracy ends up not being very democratic.

Concentrating mainly on the workplace, Deetz (1992) points out situations where the tenets of liberal democracy has given power to our institutions and taken it away from people. Specifically he wrote about how the workplace encroached upon people's non-work lives. While workers are technically "free," this means they are free to leave which does not solve any problems (p. 54). He gives examples of personal choices at least partially controlled by the institution such as where people live, who and when they marry and possibly have children, their education and entertainment. Both Barber and Deetz seem to agree while people want their individual rights protected, they entrust those rights to an institution such as a corporation more than they would to their own peers. While they both argue that liberal democracy's main motive is representation, Barber feels that representation does not "secure democracy nor guarantee liberty" (xiv). Deetz (1992) feels that a system built on representation fails because it "requires no real discussion, action, or responsibility on the part of the public" (p. 152).

Additionally, corporations highlight the cyclical nature of liberal democracy with their lack of community participation in their design. While more attention was made to protect workers in the seventies such as discrimination and harassment programs, Deetz argues these programs did not continue developing in the following decade. Again, in concert with Barber, Deetz shows how the “rational” decisions made by workers actually serve to reify the system where self and corporate advantage perpetuate itself. Once reified, these practices become normalized and institutionalized making any departure from them worthy of discipline—unobtrusive control in its most genius form. Liberal democracy through communication controls who creates knowledge and meaning within our workplace.

Deetz argues that because our experience, identity, language and technologies have a political nature themselves, the entire concept of democracy must be reformed (p. 146). Instead of focusing on the struggle between the personal and the social, liberal democracy shifted the focus to the struggle between the individual and the state. While the humanistic psychological movement impacted this, it shifted the focus yet again to the struggle between subject and object. For Deetz, this reformation cannot take place without acknowledging a participatory conception of communication that will play a central role in this change.

Barber’s alternative, strong democracy, closely resembles the idea of collaboration in its ideal form. It calls for a theory of citizenship where people act in common effort that links them together.

### *Strong Democracy*

The terminology for this family name came from Barber (1984).

Participation, he argues, not in a normative sense but in a deliberative, acting, behaving, engaging, sharing and contributing way, is necessary for building strong democracy. Strong democracy uses a self-sustaining dialectic to encourage civic activity and nourish freedom, self-responsibility, and equality. "In strong democracy, politics is something done by, not done to, citizens" (p. 133). He calls it the politics of amateurs where every man is compelled to encounter every other man without the intermediary of expertise, but for what they offer through participation. Then, he goes on to argue the importance of developing community and citizenship through that participation. He defines strong democracy as:

Strong democracy in the participatory mode resolves conflict in the absence of an independent ground through a participatory process of ongoing, proximate self-legislation and the creation of a political community capable of transforming dependent private individuals into free citizens and partial and private interests into public goods (p. 151).

Strong democracy exists in many forms. Its motif is to invent something that does not hold our own positions as final, but that innovates, develops something new and better so we are making decisions for the common good.

Barber (1984) explains how the preferences people bring to the strong democratic process will be tested and challenged. He cites Skinner (1979) as a liberal political philosopher who claimed that political language must be malleable. Barber argues terms will be discussed and made problematic. "Does *freedom* denote the absence of governmental intervention in our lives, or does it mean the presence of radical self-legislation?" (p. 157). Politics, he argues, is

where we as a group of citizens decide what the terms should mean. The process is a messy one, where diverse opinions, values and language are hashed out and the product eventually becomes a unified action. "This conclusion suggests that the task of democracy must be to invent procedures, institutions, and forms for citizenship that nurture political judgment and succor common choice and action in the absence of metaphysics" (p. 166).

Barber (1984) outlines the three phases of strong democracy as political talk, the application of political judgment as public decision-making, and the realization of common talk and common will as common work and action. The talk requires as much listening as speaking, affective as well as cognitive aspects, and reflection. Talk must accomplish the dual purpose of both a rational interest and all of the meanings that make it the human activity that it is. "Political talk is not talk about the world; it is talk that makes and remakes the world" (p. 177).

Barber lists the nine functions of strong democratic talk: "the articulation of interests, bargaining and exchange; persuasion; agenda-setting; exploring mutuality; affiliation and affection; maintaining autonomy; witness and self-expression; reformulation and reconceptualization; community building as the creation of public interests, common goods, and active citizens" (p. 178-9).

Strong democracy relies on the concept of "will" over "choice." The idea is a group of citizens can will certain events to happen in their world to create the reality that is where and how they want to live. One assumption necessary for this position is people are inherently social, civic bonds are voluntary, and all people are inherently related through a mutual fate. Barber calls for many new programs

such as neighborhood assemblies as part of a national plan to introduce strong democracy. These strongly resemble community collaborations we see throughout the collaboration literature.

While strong democracy may seem a lot like communitarianism, it is not. The difference is that strong democracy requires many steps before coming together and communitarianism assumes being together trumps all else. In strong democracy people need to explain their own interests and then learn where other people stand. Only once all of the interests are out on the table can people devise solutions together that work for everyone. Communitarianism is more about giving up your own interests for the common good through a bond of culture, community, religion, etc. Communitarianism has no requirement for autonomy while Barber specifically names it as necessary in strong democratic talk (see p. 46).

Deetz (1992) agrees with Barber's ideas about strong democracy, but advocates keeping communication central to the solution. "The problems of everyday-life democracy become a problem of communication systems and a reconsideration of the connection of the person to the community" (p. 158). He supports a participatory conception of communication, which not only embraces the "possibility and conditions for the mutual production of meaning, but also provides a description of communication problems and inadequacies" (p. 171). He names the recovery of conflict and the constant critique of any consensus as necessary for change. Different points of view must be explored and alternative solutions developed. The motive of communication, he claims, is not for "self-

expression,” but for “self-destruction” (p. 341). The point is to give up one’s own stances and to be open to what other people, the environment, and creativity bring. Also, a vow to treat people as human beings, to exercise care and awareness of “otherness” is vitally important. Deetz calls for “insight, critique, and education” (p. 345-6).

Deetz and Simpson (2004) further developed this idea and called it the politically responsive constructionist theory of communication. Their theory requires communication practice that “facilitate[s] voice”...is based in a “recovery of conflict and a specific understanding of free and open communication” (p. 143). They illustrate how a certain group of people involved in a university retreat used dialogue in the face of conflict to begin to understand the “other” and have the possibility of producing new meanings unavailable through their native ways of communicating.

During this retreat, approximately 100 students, faculty, staff, and administrators had an opportunity to view 30 posters compiled from words and images taken from newspaper clippings and interviews with campus members and to react by posting notes and responding both to the display and to one another (p. 153).

One example of a statement made by a white, male faculty member that participants were supposed to respond to was the following: “What’s really missing is caring and generosity. When a faculty, a typical faculty member is approached by a student group or even by an individual students, there’s already a kind of tension of an adversarial relationship” (p. 156). Deetz and Simpson (2004) found people recognized their own perceptions reflected in some of the notes others wrote responding to the words and images. They also found,

however, people offered completely different views, which challenged how they understood the world. Two varied responses to the aforementioned statement are as follows: "The stressful academic culture-pressures for achievement for everyone-makes it difficult to find space and time for generosity" (p. 156). A very different response was, "I have found caring and generosity. What is missing is public support for those who are caring and generous" (p. 156).

While this example does not show anything other than the fact that awareness of different positions was raised, it was at least the first phase of Barber's talk about strong democracy. From this retreat the participants may agree to disagree. However, the stage would also be set for them to follow through with the other prerequisites to strong democracy listed on page 46.

The exercise opened participant's eyes and had the potential to create new meanings for people. It helped form many of the organization's primary issues of concern. In several of the examples, it evoked strong feelings. This unique alternative to a meeting or typical retreat is the first steps of strong democracy.

### SUMMARY

Understanding the larger picture of people's ideas about the ways they should communicate is the focus of this study. I do this by paying attention to the process by which they are communicating. This process is influenced by several different levels of preferences. Some are espoused, while some are embedded. Often, a gap exists between the two. Every preference ties back to a worldview about communication. The five sets of interrelated principles form a heuristic that



sensitizes us to different ways people look at the world and understand their role in it. People's worldviews shape how they interact with others.

The following chapter provides examples in which scholars have explored the role of communication and collaboration. It reviews the literature on descriptive and instructive studies of communication and collaboration. Also, it highlights espoused and embedded preferences of communication within those studies. Next, it shows some of the unintended consequences certain preferences created. Finally, it shows how extant literature has largely ignored how preferences of communication tie back to worldviews about it. The chapter ends with research questions informing the study.

### CHAPTER 3: THE STUDY OF PREFERENCES IN COMMUNICATION

The heuristic developed in the previous chapter sensitizes us to worldviews that influence people's choices of communication. I will now turn to the literature to see how scholars have explored the role of preferences in communication. As previously stated, many scholars who write about communication and collaboration do so on a descriptive or instructive level. First, I will recall descriptive and instructive studies of communication and collaboration. Next, I will look at espoused preferences of communication identified by either the group being studied as part of their organizational practices or by the scholar reporting the study. Then, I will look at the embedded preferences of a group revealed to the researcher through studying communication practices. Finally, I will explore the gap between preferences and consequences in different groups. These extant studies bring up several questions about choices of communication. Also, they expose the missing tie between people's preferences and their larger beliefs about communication. Those questions guide this dissertation.

#### DESCRIPTIVE STUDIES OF COLLABORATION

Some scholars have described how communication works in collaborations. For example, Zoller (2000) described a community movement based on the power of dialogue to bring people together, determine what they wanted for their community and achieve it. She described how a strict adherence to an ideal model of dialogue left the community feeling dissatisfied partly

because the model did not address how to deal with every day issues such as resolving conflicts. Several conflicts arose in her site. First, the trainers who were experienced and educated on how dialogue should work did not spend adequate time training participants. This created a hierarchical situation between the trainers and the participants, which impedes true collaboration. Second, she described two different native views about communication, which conflicted. One view supported the idea that people needed to talk to achieve consensus. Yet she found that when they did talk, they often seemed to “talk past” each other (p. 201), not trying to understand what the other was saying. The other view subordinated talk to action and found dialogue a waste of time. The final conflict came between respecting difference through diverse participants and positions and developing consensus. “Dialogic theory recognizes the simultaneity of the unique knowledge that arises from our social location and the possibility of translation to transform that identity and create shared knowledge” (p. 205).

Zoller’s (2001) study describes how real people communicating is quite different from the ideal model and affects the collaboration. Pasqero (1991) in her study of a Canadian environmental collaboration described how participants shifted from adversarial ways of interacting to more collaborative. By explaining how their communication changed from traditional models, she shows the reader how communication practices affect collaborations. Haskins et al., (1998); Heath and Sias, (1999); Innes and Booher, (1999) all described how many collaborations vow to use consensus and/or democratic voting techniques. These methods of decision-making evoke certain values and require different communication

practices than a bureaucratic model. Innes and Booher (1999) described how new norms and discourses arose as a result of collaboration making the case for a reciprocal nature between communication practices and collaboration. Heath and Sias (1999) described how the content of participant's communication positively affected how participants viewed the success of the collaboration. For example, they found if people talked a lot about the mission of the collaboration, people remained more focused. Kasper-Fuerhrer and Ashkanasay (2001) described how technology assisted some communication processes in collaboration. Because collaboration members cannot meet often, efficient and effective communication helps participants feel more comfortable with the process. They described how trust can be fostered between participants when technology allows people to communicate whenever they have a need or want to communicate.

Some have described the relationship between communication and collaboration by highlighting tensions. Jones and Bodtker (1998) acknowledged the difficulty of managing ongoing dialectical tensions between a participant's role in a collaboration and their responsibilities to their stakeholder organization. They described how participants managed interactions. Specifically they addressed people who were unwilling to speak up, how certain topics were never discussed, and how resolution was not reached on identity or authority issues. All of these tensions affected the success of the collaboration. Medved et al. (2001) identified tensions in a health care change initiative ranging from broad systemic levels to individual levels such as the tensions between people external to the change process and those actually working on it, and individuals who only wanted

to communicate with other people who were like them. They described the impact of participants explaining their viewpoints to others. People were more likely to listen and respect that person's stance.

Through these studies we see different descriptions of how communication is done within collaborations. Perhaps more importantly these studies show that it makes a difference how it is done. As some of these studies allude, Deetz and Brown (2003) argue how native skills of communication often cripple rather than aid participation. Their study turns instructive as they outline the needs for participation, namely a place for it to occur and the importance of voice. Other scholars offer advice on how to better collaborate.

#### INSTRUCTIVE STUDIES OF COLLABORATION

Some scholars have focused their attention on certain practices and factors they believe should exist in a collaboration. Gray and Wood (1991) suggested collaborations should have a shared vision or mission. One asserted fostering an effective network of communication between participants in a collaboration is essential for that collaboration's success Steglin and Jones (1991). Mintzberg et al. (1996) believe face-to-face communication is important in collaborations because it allows for non-verbals. Lawrence, Hardy, and Philips (2002) wrote, "collaboration is a cooperative, interorganizational relationship that is negotiated in an ongoing communicative practice" (p. 282). Marshall (1995) argued collaboration should be a "principle-based process of working together that produces trust, integrity and breakthrough results by building true consensus, ownership and alignment in all aspects of other ways to think about collaboration"

(p.15). Haskins, Liedtka, and Rosenblum (1998) classified collaboration as a step further than teams that required a desire to serve. Keyton and Stallworth (2003) drew on Stallworth's (1998) characteristics of a successful collaboration: shared goal, member interdependence, equal input of participants, and shared decision-making. They classified those characteristics as "products of the reflexive relationship between the communication of collaboration members and the development of the collaboration's culture and operating procedures" (p. 240). Barrett (1995) proposed his idea that to collaborate well, a participant should hold collaborative competence. One example he provided was participants should be aware of the hierarchical implications of titles, roles, and rewards and therefore to avoid using them.

All of these scholars offer their own advice to collaborators on how to do it better. I want to understand what the participants of collaborations think about communication. Calling on previously accomplished studies provides examples of communication preferences both espoused by participants and also embedded in their talk.

### ESPOUSED PREFERENCES

Espoused preferences are those explicitly stated in rules and expectations of communication within a certain setting. They will be different depending on the type/purpose of the organization. For instance, a women's shelter will have different preferences of communication than a traditional hierarchical corporation. These notions will draw on cultured norms of what the communication in a specific type of organization is supposed to look like. Espoused preferences are

the ones that become institutionalized over time. Not every organization will have explicit preferences of communication.

Ashcraft's (2001) study of a feminist agency for battered women and their children exemplifies an organization committed to using explicit communication practices. They called it ethical communication and it was a set of rules developed by a scholar in a paper presented at the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence. Everyone had to abide by these rules and the members believed it set them apart from other organizations and contributed to their success. The communication in this group shows a connection to the humanistic psychological approach to communication as well as an explicit way of communicating that performs a regulatory function for a group of people. The agency existed to empower women. They very carefully structured their practices and accepted volunteers based on this goal. They understood that normative ways of communicating perpetuated hegemonic masculinity and instead adopted "ethical communication," a feminist way of communicating that valued empowerment, and provided an alternative way of organizing that did not allow "coercive, and ostensibly masculine ways of managing difference" (p. 89). To restate their ideals, this group evoked two very different visions of how they saw their organization existing in the world. One vision was of empowerment and feminist ideals based on the humanistic psychological family of preferences. The other vision was a hegemonic ideal based on liberal democracy, strength of the majority, and traditional ways of organizing. They embraced the first vision, and rejected the second.

Their communication practices were regulated by their preferences. Their training manual laid out the principles of ethical communication and in interviews they echoed the importance of everyone practicing ethical communication no matter how difficult it was for some. They valued relationships between each other and regulated their communication to foster those relationships. Ashcraft (2001) listed the basic principles of a “feminist communication ethic” as printed in the SAFE training manual. They were:

Open communication is essential; because different perspectives enrich the group process, every member’s views are important; oppression is silencing; our climate should encourage members to raise opposing views; members should deal with a situation as directly as possible; if necessary for feedback, a member may discuss a situation involving a particular person with others, provided those others are clear about their role as facilitators, not validators; conflict does not always have to be engaged, but it must always be named; because personal relationships affect the group as a whole, they are not necessarily private; and, the means is the end (p. 91-92).

Ashcraft (2001) then went on to describe how SAFE members provided their own definitions of how ethical communication works. They said it involves:

...honesty till it hurts, having a process, being straight up, clean communication, mutual respect, learning and growing about ourselves and together, keeping a tight container around communication, not a lot of loose talk, and you don’t have to agree with everyone, but you need to be direct and straightforward (p. 92).

In this case study, the espoused preferences of the organization were the same as the embedded preferences within their communication practices. This can be true in other contexts.

A different type of espoused preferences is found in Robert’s Rules of Order. Many organizations use these rules to help structure their meetings.



Henry Martyn Robert was an engineering officer in the Army when he was asked to run a church meeting and did not know how ([www.robertsrules.com](http://www.robertsrules.com)). He reasoned that learning something about Parliamentary procedure might be helpful. Ten editions later, several organizations are still using these guidelines to conduct their meetings. If we explore the choices behind these rules we see a regulated system of communicating that can be linked to the rational/argumentative/information cluster of communication preferences. For example, there are very explicit ways to obtain the floor, make motions and resolutions, second motions, one topic is presented at a time, debate ensues, motions are seconded again and the vote is announced. This system prefers order. Elected officers such as the president or chairman have more power and privilege. It prefers majority rule in voting, and it highlights the rights of groups to remove people from their meetings.

As mentioned above, different ways of organizing hold norms about what that means. For example, most notions of collaboration seem to be based in humanistic psychological ideals about people, empowerment and trust. Could it be that the term “collaboration” is short hand for capturing humanistic psychological values? Clearly, the term collaboration has a tilt to it. Gray’s (1989) notion of successful collaboration includes both member and process elements. With regard to members, “inclusion of all affected stakeholders and sufficient stakeholder incentives” is most important. Here we see instructive ideals presented. In the process, “agreement on the scope of the collaboration, ripeness of issue(s), timing, negotiating in good faith, and maintaining good

relationships with constituents" (p. 261-262) are most important. These factors do not indicate a centralization of all members, anyone with an interest, but instead narrow down to stakeholders only. The process in Gray's (1989) definition seems to hold an even par with the members. "Belief in the potential of the process coupled with a realistic appreciation of the possible obstacles is essential to success" (p. 267). Gray seems to use a mixture of preferences putting her faith in a notion of strong democracy. She holds the hope of innovation, and believes that in order to get there some complexity of positions (stakeholders) is necessary.

Gray has explicit rules she believes in with regard to communication in collaborations. The first phase of her collaborative process is problem setting. That phase, "is concerned with getting to the table so that face-to-face dialogue can begin" (p. 57). When she writes about collaborative groups she says, "Reaching agreement about how the stakeholders will interact with each other is vital to direction setting" (p. 75). This includes an outline of acceptable and unacceptable behavior and how the meeting/interaction will be different from more conventional processes. We see a different example of espoused preferences of communication in a cooperative organization.

In a similar vein, Cheney's (1999) study of the Mondragon cooperatives, a business venture set-up to improve the way people work together and in turn create a better society, showed the struggles of maintaining democracy and workplace participation in a market driven society. While the cooperatives did not have an explicit set of communication rules, they were designed in a very

particular way. For example, they felt that it was important to always allow and encourage their employees to give their opinion “up the chain” of command to the top instead of always having the people on top dictating down to the employees.

The Mondragon cooperatives Cheney (1999) studied embrace an explicit preference for liberal democracy in the way they are structured and arguably a bit of the unitary cluster with the heavy influence of Basque culture. Their charter lists the values of a cooperative: “solidarity, participation, and equality” (p.13). We have to dig a little deeper through their communication practices than we did in Ashcraft’s study as they have no list or posted code of explicit preferences of communication. What they do have, however, is a very explicit way of thinking about what it means to be part of a cooperative and how to communicate within one. Perhaps surprising for a cooperative, the two examples of explicit communication practices look similar to what we might see in a bureaucratic organization. Cheney (1999) acknowledged this when he wrote, “the challenge of maintaining cooperative values in a corporate context is one of its [Mondragon’s] greatest preoccupation” (p. 11).

Because the cooperatives are worker-owned, participation is one of their explicit preferences. One communication process that supports the choice of participation is seen in the expectations for meeting attendance. Each cooperative has a general assembly made up of all the worker members. Every member is expected to come to the annual meeting of the general assembly. Cheney (1999) reports, “Absences from general assembly meetings are negatively sanctioned in most co-ops” (p. 58). Worker members who miss one meeting are “advised” (p.

58). If they miss two meetings, they lose their vote, and the third absence carries a fine.

Another espoused preference the cooperatives have is that of being a democracy. One communication practice that Cheney (1999) found particularly interesting was again, part of the general assembly process. He explained that work was done ahead of the meetings to prepare key members of the cooperatives to present recommendations to the assembly. Cheney (1999) felt these meetings were "rather formal, largely scripted, and relatively controlled" despite the tendency of the members to have lively debates. The choice of democracy was manifested at Mondragon through orderly assemblies.

When scholars present instructive ways of collaborating, they are articulating their espoused preferences of communication. Some organizations and scholars will not have long and comprehensive lists of specific communication practices they endorse, but they will name certain explicit rules they believe in. For example, Barrett's (1995) collaborative competence requires appreciative learning, and casting aside boundaries (such as formal position titles) to inclusion and full participation. Likewise Barrett (1995) argued that preserving the dialogic process was important to competently collaborating. Haskins, Liedtka and Rosenblum (1998) wrote that a collaborative ethic built on trust and value-based processes such as consensus and sharing power lead to a successful collaboration.

Stallworth (1998) named four elements necessary for successful collaboration: (1). Shared goal, (2). Member interdependence, (3). Equal input of

participants, and (4). Shared decision-making. Her perspective is rooted in the humanistic psychological approach with the members being more highly valued than the process. Since she does not specify the communication practices that would enable these elements to be seen by observation, we turn to a case study that uses her work.

Keyton and Stallworth (2003) define the ideal collaboration as being comprised of the four elements of Stallworth's (1998) argument about what it takes for successful collaboration. They argue that these elements emerge from the communication of collaboration members. In their case study, they assess this ideal. This discussion includes only one example from their assessment. The first element of Stallworth's (1998) ideal for successful collaboration is a shared goal. Each stakeholder involved in the Drug Dealer Eviction Program (DDEP), the police department, district attorney's office, the neighborhood watch, crimestoppers and sheriff's department all worked toward evicting drug dealers from rental properties. This was their shared goal, which evoked a sense of preferences from the unitary cluster. What they found, however, was that the daily communication practices this group used held embedded choices which were interpreted in different ways by different members of the group based on the way they saw the world. This phenomenon is not uncommon. People make sense of preferences differently. Medved's et al. (2001) study of a health care initiative reported similar findings in that the group shared the espoused preference of forming a collaboration to change the health care system, yet the embedded choices in their communication processes created tensions.

This gap between espoused and embedded preferences is why we often see organizations espouse such broad values as integrity and quality. Cheney (1999) suggested that Thomas Jefferson understood how vague terms could unite people and that is why the Declaration of Independence has “abstract values such as ‘liberty,’ ‘equality,’ and ‘the pursuit of happiness.’” Cheney (1999) wrote that Jefferson felt these widely interpreted values provided enough commonality for people to associate with and yet not notice that some of the values, such as liberty and equality, created huge tensions especially in the era of slavery. People agree that those are important ideas, yet how they go about practicing them through their communication is very different. The Tracy and Craig (2003) study is another illustration of the gap between espoused and embedded preferences of communication. Their study portrayed a community’s school board who espoused a democratic way of organizing to improve the schools within the community. They showed how people evoked different communicative ideals about democracy. Some approached democracy with the notion that everyone should have their time to speak and be heard in meetings. Those people advocated democracy in the form of inclusion, openness, respect and cooperation. Others said democracy was not equal to smooth communication, but equal to conflict. They argued that people acting undemocratically were guilty of intimidation, interference, undermining decisions, lack of respect for the process, and breaking rules and bragging about it. What happened, however, was that tensions developed in meetings because the practice of democracy was interpreted differently not only by different people, but by the same people depending on

their strategy. Tracy and Craig (2003) showed how people use communication strategically to accomplish their specific goal at that time.

While espoused preferences reflect the commitments of participants within the organization, the embedded choices within every day communication practices determine consequences for any group.

### EMBEDDED PREFERENCES

Even when we do not see people explicitly listing preferences of communication or calling on certain practices that they have agreed support their preferences, we see choice more subtly enacted. For example, any time someone says something such as, "let me finish," or "we need to make sure everyone has their say," they are enacting preferences of communication they think many people will find important. Embedded preferences, like espoused choices of communication, are cultural norms people think should occur in a specific type of organization. What we often see in communication practices of real life is totally different than the explicit choices to which people have committed. Cheney puts this well when he says, "To assert democracy is one thing; to enact it or to bring it to life is something else" (p. 25).

Cheney's (1999) study of the Mondragon cooperatives also provides a strong example of how we see enacted preferences. The Mondragon cooperatives, a business venture set-up to improve the way people work together and in turn create a better society, showed the struggles of maintaining democracy and workplace participation in a market driven society. This example illustrates how the democratic participation which could be traced back to the humanistic

psychological family of communication, worked in this context. Cheney explored “how a value such as democracy is preserved through both the talk about it and the arrangements to make it happen” (p. xiii). Cheney specifically looks at organizational communication to include “who’s ‘in the loop,’ what people in meetings are saying, how much they’re saying, how they’re saying it, who’s talking and who’s not, what’s being said, what options are not being considered, and so on (see Clay 1994)” p. 25. A large part of what he analyzes is the implicit rules from interactions between people. Cheney goes into great depth about the challenges of balancing attention to people, the cooperative’s professed preference for democracy, and attention to the market. For example, when Cheney wrote about the growth that the cooperatives experienced he brought in statements from workers who said that the work environment had changed from being more family like to more corporate. Additionally, the workers felt there was less informal talk because the business was so big and the pace of work increased. Workers also felt that with growth came more layers of management making their organization less like a cooperative and more like a regular corporation. Although there was no explicit rules set-up for face-to-face, intimate, and informal communication, Cheney found these norms being missed by the people who worked at the cooperatives before it expanded. From their nostalgic talk, he was able to see those preferences that they held as important.

Keyton and Stallworth’s (2003) discovered in interviews of collaborative members working on the DDEP that participants blamed procedural problems within the collaboration on “lack of frequent communication between



collaborative members outside of DDEP meetings. Some members felt the need to meet more regularly, although other members did not” (p.246). Despite an overall shared goal, this example of different views on how the process of communication works in collaborations set up a tension within the group. Frequency of communication is a preference-based decision on how often we should talk. Depending on the resources communicators are drawing from and the strategy they are using, their ideas about frequency will differ. A rational/argumentative/information communicator might want to talk frequently about a subject they are interested in while not much about other issues. A communitarian will want to listen and talk a lot about any issues that affect the community as a whole.

Medved's, et al. (2001) study of a community health care initiative is another example that helps us understand how preferences of communication play out in a collaborative setting. The researchers theorized communication as a way to “reveal, frame, and ameliorate” tensions (p. 139). They identified five tensions that came up in the health care initiative. These tensions are the result of people agreeing on a common espoused preference, yet disagreeing on the choices embedded in their communication processes. After identifying the tension, Medved et al. (2001) offered instructive ways of dealing with that tension. In doing this, they highlight the espoused preferences of the group and then show how the embedded choices of communication cause tensions within the group. For example, they label the first tension as the ownership tension, a disconnect between the preferences of the external funders of a collaborative effort and the

internal collaborative group that is “doing the work.” The funders want to leave the options wide open for the collaborative group, set no parameters, yet when the group made a decision the funders tried to alter it. While the funders thought it important to “leave the collaborative group alone,” let them work it out, they used the only communication practice they knew that went along with that ideal—not communicating, until after the group had made the decision and at that point when the funders all of a sudden had demands, the collaborative group felt the funders had a hidden agenda and distrusted them.

Medved, et al. (2001) suggested the funders be “explicit about their role and the evolution of their role over time” and internal collaborative members “acknowledge timelines”...and the importance of technical assistance (p. 142). Both groups actually needed input from the other, yet instead of being communicative along the way, they waited until a decision was made and subsequently decided it needed alterations. This type of communication may be more typical in a hierarchical type organization where tasks are assigned and then when the finished product is presented, parameters and adjustments seem to come out of nowhere. Often the people working on the project feel they’ve wasted time. If they had just had that guidance going into the project, they could have kept the parameters in mind.

In this first case, the espoused preference of the funders and the collaborative members was freedom to collaborate. The embedded choice of communication was freedom as long as the decision the collaborative group came up with met the expectation of the funders. The funders framed acceptable

communication between the funders and the collaborative group members as no communication until the final decision was made. The collaborative members, however, framed acceptable communication as the need for the funder's guidance throughout the collaborative process.

The second tension they identified existed between linear, pre-planned models of change, and realistic change efforts which are much more messy, often chaotic and surprising. The health care initiative members wanted change, but in their prescribed and confined way. In their case a non-linear impetus for change-- a negative article about the initiative-- formed coalitions and started change. New relationships formed from a constantly changing membership that caused "shifting of resources, new organizational alliances, new operating procedures, and new program development" (p. 143). While the members knew change was vital as part of their goal, they could not conceive of it happening in such an unfamiliar way. Their espoused preference for change in this instance did occur, but not in their normative way of thinking about communication processes. Medved et al. (2001) suggested the importance of understanding that change does not always happen "neatly" and that by communicating this to members, it might be helpful to them.

The third tension they identified was between "easy win" projects or short-term successes that keep collaborative participants motivated and long-term change efforts that the collaborations set out to achieve. While the members working within the collaboration often need to see small victories or progress to keep them motivated, these can be mistaken as the end goal of the group and

actually hinder their progress. In other words, the way the group members communicate about those short-term goals may affect their long-term outcomes. Unfortunately, this particular article from Medved et al. (2001) does not provide any recorded talk from members around this subject but regardless it provides another example of how a tension influences outcomes. While this group espoused their long-term goal of changing the community health care system, encouraging doctors to work together to provide a better service, the group may have gotten in their own way of achieving that goal by getting stuck at a more interim achievement.

The fourth tension called the “homophily tension” existed between the comfort of communicating with people who shared a similar worldview and the need for diversity in order to devise creative solutions to problems in health care. “We gravitate toward people like ourselves, while we learn our most important information from people who are not like us” (p.144). We perceive that people like us share our values, so we communicate more with them and our perceptions of being on the same page grow. Medved et al. (2001) reported in their site that when the diverse collaborative group first came together, there were a wide variety of perspectives, experiences, and ways of communicating. The values underlying their normative ideals about the processes of communication were different. Some of the people unfamiliar with health care jargon felt intimidated and stopped attending. On the other hand, the researchers noted that in other sites where normally excluded stakeholders were included, the result was a much more informed and cooperative collaborative group. Medved et al. (2001) concluded

that even though it was difficult to try to hold on to heterogeneity in groups, it was well worth it. A great example of the gap between espoused and embedded preferences, this fourth tension shows how a group who espoused the preference of diversity was stuck in communication practices that actually impaired its achievement and tended to bring people together who were more like themselves.

Finally, the fifth tension they identified was the tension between political sharing of information with the intent to build coalitions and the protection of that information within the marketplace. Medved et al. (2001) craftily described the sensitivity of managing some balance between the regular collaborative meetings and the one-on-one meetings mandated by funders. They concluded that managing this tension required “high levels of political acumen as well as established and trusted social connections with the key influentials” (p. 147). We can certainly appreciate the difficulty of being guarded in communication and trying to understand how separate resources and needs best fit into a large, overarching plan without stepping on toes and creating unfair advantages. While some people are undoubtedly better at playing the politics game than others, our normative ways of communicating around guarded issues often circumvents what we are trying to accomplish.

Although not identified as a tension, Medved et al. (2001) found that the process of communication can be synonymous with the work of collaboration. In other words, people talking about their assumptions and worldviews does quite a bit of the work necessary around making decisions together. They advocated discussion of espoused preferences noting that normative ways of communicating

often do not reveal more than the person's positions, and not their true viewpoints on the way the world works and what it means to be part of a collaboration.

A different way scholars approached ideals of communication is found in school board meetings where Tracy and Craig (2003) showed how preferences of communication are evoked at certain times in a normative way. They provide a way of extracting sets of beliefs about communication and ideals from people's usages of certain terms. Through their study of talk during school board meetings they focus on two key words, democracy and communication. They "describe the speech and contexts in which references to democracy surface. "The contexts we show are ones in which references to communication are regularly present" (p. 2).

The school board members enacted a typical liberal democracy where freedom of speech was foregrounded, yet unitary choices playing to the ideal of community were also evoked. Additionally, communication practices in this specific case study contain embedded preferences from the humanistic psychological cluster. For example, the idea of a school board with elected members representing constituents comes from liberal democracy. Community members accepted their differences yet were guilty of trying to persuade one another about their beliefs—argumentative/rational/informative view. The fact that the community was trying to come to a stand together on issues related to the school was a unitary move. In other words, this study shows members engaging in a more selective process of drawing on specific resources at specific times. The fact that people draw on different clusters of preferences of communication

does not surprise us. In fact, we would expect to see these families of ideals drawn upon in any larger notion of democracy.

Tracy and Craig (2003) argued that people use contrary “threads” of the preference of democracy to advance their own strategic aims. Specifically, they reported that members of the school board equated different communication strategies with the different ways they wanted to explain democracy. For example, democracy was not equal to smooth communication, but equal to conflict. People acting undemocratically were guilty of intimidation, interference, undermining decisions, lack of respect for the process, and breaking rules and bragging about it. When communication and democracy were used together, communication was situated as a problem or needing work. They showed, “The communication practices that facilitate democracy in its unitary form are inclusion of everyone, with an openness to information, respectful treatment of participants, and a cooperative problem-solving stance...Failure to communicate in this fashion, then, is a failure to act democratically” (p. 9).

Tracy and Craig (2003) named three sets of contradictory beliefs or tensions between preferences they identified in their study. They showed how different members of the school board situated democracy and communicated in ways that fit their own personal strategies and were contradictory to each other. The tensions they described were: 1). Rules of fairness vs. justice blockers. Rules are normally put into place to ensure democracy (rules of fairness), yet often people think true democracy occurs when someone believes in something so much they break the rules (rules as justice blockers). Similarly, accepted

communication practices included following the rules appropriate to the situation (rules of fairness), yet some people believed free and open communication only occurred when rules were broken and people went “out on a limb” to say something they truly believe in (rules as justice blockers). 2). Representing one’s constituency vs. exercising judgment. Normally, those representing a certain population were supposed to deliver a view that reflected the majority’s feelings (representing one’s constituency), yet often that elected official acted in the best long-term interest of the majority even if it did not reflect their current views (exercising judgment). Following the job description of a community representative, that person must listen carefully and accurately capture the majority’s position (representing one’s constituency). Tracy and Craig (2003) point out that the two ways to counter this is to (a) refute that the representative’s position adequately captures the majority’s position and (b) characterize a representative’s role in a democracy as one that exercises judgment (exercising judgment). 3). Unitary vs. adversary forms of democracy. These terms pose two different ways of thinking about democracy. Unitary democracy assumes people have a shared goal and will work together to solve it. Adversary democracy assumes that people will have competing views and a true democracy functions to allow people to present those views and then make a decision via a majority vote. Communication around unitary democracy values is, “inclusion of everyone, with an openness to information, respectful treatment of participants, and a cooperative, problem-solving stance” (p. 9). Communication around adversary democracy involves advocacy.



While Tracy and Craig (2003) outline how preferences can be extracted from talk, they do not develop the possible consequences of the tensions between how people conceptualize preferences and communicate them. Are these tensions evoked in other meetings? Regardless of whether a group espouses and enacts the same set of preferences, or whether tensions exist because the choices espoused by a group are lost through their communication processes, we can be sure there will be consequences of the way they talk. Every choice people make about the words they use, and the ways they use them have certain consequences.

#### THE GAP BETWEEN PREFERENCES AND CONSEQUENCES

In all of the aforementioned case studies consequences resulted from the preferences groups enacted. Each scholar approaches reporting these consequences in a bit of a different way. For example, Ashcraft (2001) pointed out that one of the consequences of using ethical communication was the ineffectiveness of the organization she studied to make decisions. Cheney (1999) made note of conflicts that resulted from tensions between what people expected and what actually happened. Tracy and Craig (2003) noted that preferences of communication could be used strategically. In Keyton and Stallworth (2003) the enacted preferences resulted in consequences that were quite different than those involved intended. In Lange (2003) the consequence of enacting certain preferences of communication resulted in accomplishing their goal, but not without challenging people's conceptions of how it was supposed to play out.

If we look at Ashcraft's SAFE organization, their dedication to the particular communication practice called ethical communication reflected the

preferences they held important, yet the path they chose had consequences.

Consider the following example from a member of the agency.

That's the same thing like when we approach the mom. It's the same dynamic. We just walk in there and say, "Hi, looks like things are stirring up, can I help?" Not, "What are you doing?!" Or, "You shouldn't be talking to Tommy that way!" Even though that's what's going on in your head. Yeah, that's the really neat thing about ethical communication (p. 103).

Ashcraft noted, however, while this group espoused preferences of empowerment and feminism, the practice of ethical communication served in part to accomplish the same things they were fighting against. For example, in practice ethical communication valued people who valued themselves, could express their ideas clearly, maintained orderliness, used tact, and for the most part agreed with one another. These embedded choices led to consequences that included developing the self over the community, privileging "articulate, assertive members with advanced analytical and conflict skills", (p. 103), inauthenticity, and "discouraging critical examination of its own premises," (p. 104).

Preserving humanistic psychological preferences in communication made it difficult for this group to make decisions. This example points to questions about preference conflicts, how they arise, where do they originate, how do different communication practices point to them, and how do preference tensions and contradictions play out in different settings?

Likewise, consequences exist for using Robert's Rules of Order in a meeting. Not everyone has the opportunity to bring up relevant information at the time they see fit. In this system of communication, adhering to the process, or

following the rules serves as a substitute for doing what is right, for allowing everyone to speak, for airing conflict and facilitating discussion. Think about the way different issues are framed simply by the order the information about them is presented. Many organizations today use bits and pieces of Robert's Rules of Order, but in most American settings we do not see the strict adherence we once did.

Similarly, Cheney highlighted some practices he felt challenged democracy and produced a gap between espoused preferences and consequences of embedded choices: the link between a group of top manager's salaries and the market; "financial, technical, and job-specific forms of training" trumping "philosophical, social and practical aspects of cooperativism" (p. 134-135); refraining from making strong objections to corporate policy; top-down information vs. opinion upward. While this list does not recap every criterion that Cheney used to rate the "vitality of its organizational democracy" (p. 132), it shows that every preference an organization acts on has consequences. Sometimes choices compete. For example, the change in policy where top management made more money commensurate with the market, profoundly affected "notions of equity and fairness" among organizational members (p. 134). This was a foundational value on which the cooperatives were built. Once the trust was challenged, members no longer felt they had the security or solidarity they once had.

The consequences for Keyton and Stallworth's (2003) group were unintended. Lack of regular communication made it easier for the centralized

power to make decisions, thus increasing ownership for itself and decreasing ownership in the collaboration for others. The researchers found that infrequent and ineffective communication hindered the development of a “strong and unique culture for the collaboration” (p. 246). The researchers also found that collaborative members evaluated communication on the standards applicable in their stakeholder organizations. Even though collaboration may demand more frequency of communication than is required in their stakeholder organization, members have difficulty transitioning their communication practices from one context to another. The consequences of normative patterns of communication may be that the collaboration does not play out in the way intended.

Another example of consequences that come from implementing certain ideals of communication can be found in Lange’s (2003) study of the Applegate Partnerships, an environmental collaboration in Oregon and Northern California. In the collaboration itself, communication involved certain groups dominating the agenda, “philosophical disagreements were incessantly and unproductively argued, anger was commonly expressed, and decade-long friendships and working relationships were nearly abandoned” (Lange, 2003, p. 224). In this case the espoused preference of friendship was compromised when people’s normative ideas of communication were challenged when anger and disagreement entered the conversation. In this particular case Lange (2003) found from his exit interviews evidence of community building and transformation, empowerment and recognition. In some of the other cases discussed earlier, communication inhibited collaborative groups from achieving their espoused goals. In this case,

despite the fact that collaborative members may have shared a goal, the communication went against their normative ideas about friendly talk, did not affect achievement of some of the goals of the collaboration, i.e. community building and transformation, empowerment and recognition. It did, however, affect some of the other goals the collaboration set out to do such as timber sale agreements (p. 229)

The consequences of enacted preferences in communication processes vary widely. Understanding people's larger belief systems about communication is largely missing from the literature. The issues raised thus far about espoused and embedded preferences, the overarching worldview they come from, and the gap between choices and consequences feed the questions on which this study is based.

### QUESTIONS GUIDING THIS STUDY

Drawing on empirical examples where people have used preferences of communication in a specific way within their collaborative efforts may allow us to see how these choices are introduced and practiced and the larger notions they come from. As a part of that analysis any tensions or contradictions that arise and the idea that it is a collaboration adds a different dimension to this discussion. The aforementioned examples point to some questions that this research project seeks to explore. I need to know if people actually "pick and choose" from the available communication resources they know. How do people blend resources? Is this a highly coherent activity? What are the effects of blending resources? Do people draw consistently from one or more cluster of preferences? Are there

clusters people never draw from? Why? How do people make sense of the differences between how they communicate as compared to others when they are involved in the same collaborative effort? Do any patterns emerge in communication that would help us understand how preferences are used?

My specific interest is to explore how these different questions play out in public-private partnerships. I am not trying to claim that preferences motivate communication, but that they are intentional without being intended. I am tying people's preferences of communication to larger ways of thinking about communication. People express the preferences they hold yet one possible consequence that may come from playing out that choice through communication is an outcome different than what they intended. How do people both compromise and/or preserve espoused preferences with the communication they use? How does the reproduction of dominant paradigms in communication affect goals?

The complexity and messiness of the relationship between preferences of communication, espoused and embedded preferences, choices that compete, preferences expressed as part of a way of organizing, or those stemming from a person's experience are all the reasons to work on a study such as this one. I think that by using the heuristic proposed in this paper, we may be able to see some things in people's talk that we have not seen before.

With collaborations growing as a more and more viable way of solving problems with far reaching consequences, insight into the relationship between preferences of communication used and larger theories of communication is

important. I explored the complexities around preferences of communication in the context of public/private partnerships in hopes of enriching our understanding of the complexity of collaboration. I centered my research around the following questions:

**1. How do people see collaboration? Do they link it to communication?**

What are the different ideas people have about collaboration? What do they think it means? How do they associate communication and collaboration?

**2. How, when, and by whom are espoused preferences of**

**communication expressed in a collaborative process?** How do members of the collaboration describe the choices of communication and what they are trying to accomplish? How do their descriptions differ depending on their position? What is the relationship between the preferences they espouse and their actual communication?

**3. How are embedded preferences of communication put into play?**

**How do they compete in actual talk?** Using Tracy and Craig's (2003) study of school board talk as an example, what preferences of communication are noted from collaborative members' talk? Are these preferences different from those espoused by members? What is the relationship between the espoused and embedded preferences of communication?

**4. How are both kinds of preferences reproduced through**

**communication practices?** In what different ways do people define these

preferences? In what ways do these different conceptions compete? What tensions arise between competing definitions?

5. **What are the implications of tensions between espoused and embedded preferences of communication?** What happens within the group as a result of the tensions between different conceptions of if communication is good and/or bad? Is that outcome what the members intended?
6. **What are the implications of certain preferences of communication with respect to collaboration?** Specifically with regard to collaboration, what happens when espoused and embedded preferences compete and cause tensions? What could collaborations potentially learn from this study?

Chapter four outlines the research methods that helped explore these questions in my site.



## CHAPTER 4: METHODS

To answer the questions posed in the previous chapter required certain types of data. Understanding how people think and talk about communication demanded significant time with the participants. Espoused and embedded preferences of communication were explored through a number of data collection procedures. Espoused preferences were discovered through conducting interviews and looking at organizational literature to include meeting agendas, minutes, emails, and handouts/posters used to advertise training, workshops or events. Embedded choices were drawn out of participant observation, field notes, and analysis of discourse. Then, I identified clusters of preferences and compared those clusters to the general theories of communication discussed in chapter two. A longitudinal study facilitated following the collaboration long enough to find out how their preferences of communication played out. This chapter highlights general reasons for choosing my site, the types of data collected, my research role, methods of data analysis, and writing style of the research report.

To identify participant's espoused preferences required understanding their communication choices. A qualitative, field based study where I could ask people involved within the site about their choices was the best method to do this. I explored the reasons why they said certain things. Embedded choices were displayed in meeting interaction, talk, engaging in the issues and grappling over decisions. Comparing what they told me in one-on-one interviews with how I saw them interact with others helped me see gaps. Understanding consequences of their communication practices required knowing why their partnership did

things certain ways, what they were trying to accomplish, and how issues, decisions and interactions played out.

#### A SITE TO STUDY PREFERENCES OF COMMUNICATION

Based on my interest of the way preferences of communication work, a good site to study was an organization where strongly held values pervade the process of their work. In such a place, the researcher could study the espoused preferences of communication of group members as they explicitly talked about them. Then, the researcher could compare them to the embedded choices noted in their interaction. In an organization such as a public/private partnership, many of the members may share espoused preferences, which would make them interested in being part of such an organization. For example, participants would have to see the potential for gain from joining a public/private partnership in order to take the time out to do so. Naturally, some members may not be voluntary, but mandated by their stakeholder organization and that status could shift the dynamics of espoused preferences (see Amy, 1987 in Lange, 2003).

People involved in such an endeavor would likely have strong preferences and expect their work to proceed in certain ways. For example, people who believed in consensus decision-making would expect that manner of doing business to be the standard except in rare and extraordinary situations. As discussed in chapter two, people's fundamental choices that become embedded in their communication usually reflect a larger worldview about how communication works in the world. People involved in an organization like a public/private partnership have specific ideas about the goals they are trying to accomplish.

They may be interested in research that could show despite what they intend to do, their normative ways of communicating might be producing consequences other than what they intend.

I chose to analyze espoused and enacted preferences of communication via an in-depth, long-term, qualitative study of a community collaborative group, specifically a public/private partnership, interested in issues of early childhood education. This group seemed a particularly applicable site as they have strong values about helping children, representing those who could not represent themselves, and coming together to offer better services to parents with young children. My goal was to offer a perspective these collaborative organizational actors have not considered and perhaps to contribute to the scholarship on preferences of communication in organizational settings.

Several things about my site worked very well. The people involved were passionate about their work. They were real people, actively struggling to make their community collaboration work. They welcomed me and wanted any benefits I could offer through research. They offered me access. They met every month, taught me a lot about the world of early childhood education, and were connected to other groups working on similar issues.

This being said, my results are in some sense disappointing. This group's passion did not extend into their engagement, interaction or action. While they thought they were collaborating, there were no collaborative discussions. Despite their passion, people's commitment was minimal in many ways. All of the participants except one had other jobs, which took most of their time and energy.

Despite the very best intentions, this heavy workload meant a minimal commitment to membership and the specific issues of the public/private partnership. The membership was predominately made up of white women working in the school systems or in childcare. Little diversity limited the breadth of their possible solutions and their lack of participation made solutions virtually impossible.

While the next chapter describes the organizational site in detail and introduces some of the members, this chapter describes the types of data collected, my research role, methods of data analysis and writing style of the research report.

## DATA GATHERING

I was in this site for eighteen months so I can be fairly detailed about my role and the type of data that was available.

### *Researcher Role*

I conducted my research as a participant observer (Lindlof, 1995). I entered the site under the premise that I was a researcher and had an investigative purpose. However, because of the length of time I spent with this group and the fact that their membership fluctuated so much, I became one of the “regulars” who was there every month for meetings. I distinctly remember the first time someone introduced me as a member of the group at a state-level meeting (3 April 2003). After that it became a norm to be introduced that way. This level of involvement allowed me to be invited to some of the informal meetings and get-togethers and to hear stories from the members themselves, yet maintain a

separate identity as a researcher. But it was never really this neat and tidy. Some of the members would approach me about committee meetings and issues about which they wanted my opinion. It was difficult to maintain a "researcher" only role and not become involved in their quest. Also, there were at least two sides to being a participant observer. While it facilitated some freedom from total membership within the group, it also may have influenced a slower building of trust (Lindlof, 1995), and slower access to conversations where I could "really" find out how people felt about the partnership. If I had not been a researcher, I more than likely would not have been involved with such a group. I do not have children and therefore a stake in early childhood education in any direct sense. My work experience has predominately been in the military in an organization that oversaw child development centers, but only from a distance. This positioning helped me be self-reflexive about my role and had a profound impact on data analysis and the forming of my research report. I do not remember a time when anyone in the partnership asked me if I had children. Perhaps they assumed I did because I was involved, or perhaps it did not matter to them.

I did not look any different than most members of the group. Almost all were women, who ranged in age from 20 to 60 years old. Several of the members were in educational fields, full professors at community colleges, administrators in the public school system, and teachers. A few members had Ph.D.s and intimately understood the research and dissertation processes. Unquestionably, however, I took the most notes during meetings and was the only one to operate the video camera. Since we went around the room each meeting to introduce

ourselves, I re-established my position as a researcher at every monthly meeting and during training sessions. During informal conversations, however, it did not always naturally come up.

I cannot imagine being involved with a group more inclusive than this group. Although the coordinator was acting alone when she volunteered her group to me. I experienced only positive feelings, no one was ever rude to me, suggested I did not belong, or was not welcome. In fact, my experience has been quite the opposite and I always felt a part of their group and was impressed and motivated by their energy and passion for their cause. It always struck me how embracing they were.

#### *Data Collection*

I gathered data with a general plan in mind but remained sensitive to ongoing opportunities and constraints within my site. I received human subjects approval and renewed it for the second year. Below I detail my four central sources of data: fieldnotes from meetings and informal interviews, recorded meetings, transcribed scheduled interviews, and organizational information including handouts, meeting minutes, e-mail traffic, posters, advertisements about upcoming events and surveys/correspondence from the group.

#### *Meeting Observation & Informal Interviews*

Field notes were a core part of my data. In order for them to be useful I wrote field notes at the end of each day, based on my observations (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 1995). This allowed me to record what I observed while it was fresh in my mind. Field notes also allowed me to think about the day's

observation and to jot down questions and make notes. I recorded what happened as well as how people responded to it trying to understand it as they did. Field notes captured less of the content of what was said and more about how things were said. They focused on the state of mind of the participants, the mood of the meetings, descriptions of what people were wearing, how they acted, what kinds of sidebar conversations were going on, what information was passed around, how people's facial expressions responded to certain comments, etc. My field notes included a special memo of people's preferences, both espoused and embedded.

Field notes were one of my primary sources of data from the collaborative group's meetings. The meetings I attended included 2-hour monthly meetings, two different one to two-day state level meetings, full-day training sessions, and informal interviews. My observations entailed contact with an average of 25 people who attended the monthly meetings (not always the same 25 people, but usually a core of at least 10), a one-day state level meeting where the coordinators for all 18 county-based programs gathered (approximately 30 people), a two-day state level meeting that included 150 participants made up of county-based collaboration members, members from an East Coast state's similar program that was serving as technical advisor to our state, and people in the community who had a stake in early childhood education. Also, I attended a training put on by the East Coast state's staff about marketing issues of early childhood education and involving community business leaders in such an endeavor. While I felt that the majority of the meeting data I used for this project came from the monthly

meetings of my particular site, these other meetings helped me understand more about the issues around early childhood education.

At all meetings I conducted informal interviews with the members. I chatted with them before and after the meeting, sat with them at lunch, etc. A few months into my research, I asked if group members would mind if I recorded the meetings. I explained that I felt like I was missing things because I was so furiously trying to capture everything in my notes. They agreed and I recorded the monthly meetings from then on. The tapes allowed me to capture the moment-by-moment, discursive construction of partnership culture. Also, the tapes facilitated the preservation of discourse to be able to play and replay how people interacted. This helped me study not only the preferences people espouse, but also the choices embedded in their communication. I did not transcribe all of the meeting tapes. I watched them more than once and transcribed the ones that were the best exemplars of my more general findings.

In order to try to understand the expansive issue of early childhood education, I visited other organizations for tours and introductory briefings, and spent time at group activities such as their annual training sessions and "special events". Any time I spent researching, I took scratch notes and typed them up into detailed field notes within 24 hours of the observation. I used recording and elaborating practices commonly suggested in methodological discussions of participant observation (see Lindlof, 1995; Spradley, 1980).

Especially in the beginning, I spent a great deal of time talking, mostly on the phone and via e-mail with the coordinator of my specific group. I felt



comfortable asking her a wide variety of questions and I wanted to build a relationship with her as she was essentially the one who invited me to participate/observe the group. Also, she was the only member of the group whose full time job was to work council issues. All of the other members had positions in organizations that either mandated them to be involved with the group or because of a stake in the issue, made sense for them to volunteer to be a part of the collaboration. The decision to ask questions predominately of the coordinator, was a choice of convenience as she was usually reachable by phone or email and willing to talk. That choice had consequences ranging from the framing of the data available to me, to my feelings of being welcomed in the group, to the exclusion of other opinions.

In addition to the participant-observation of the collaborative group, I spoke informally with a number of people with a stake in early childhood education. They included members of collaborative councils from other counties, members of the state's technical advice team, state-level directors of the program, and executives from one military child-care program. These outside views gave me points to compare what I saw going on in the partnership as well as general information about the widespread concerns related to early childhood education.

#### *Scheduled interviews*

In order to get at preferences of communication, I spent time with partnership participants one-on-one in a relaxed and informal situation. The point of these conversations was not for them to answer questions, but for us to have a conversation and for them to talk about communication in a routine and normal

way. In order to have someone's attention for an extended period of time scheduling these conversations was necessary. I labeled these conversations as interviews only because I had a set of questions (see appendix) that were all asked yet in different order depending on how the interview progressed.

The way I recruited people to interview follows. At the end of the meetings the coordinator asked if anyone had any announcements. I said I was conducting interviews and that I would send a follow-up email to the membership with details on getting together. The people who responded first were the ones who were most involved and included the executive council (coordinator, secretary, facilitator, facilitator-elect, and treasurer). I interviewed them first.

Interviews typically lasted from 45 minutes to two hours, with a mean length of one hour and seventeen minutes. Questions were designed to try and understand how collaboration members made sense of their work, how they thought work was progressing, what they thought about communication within the partnership and what their goals were. I tried to concentrate on their stories, not letting my own infuse theirs (Gubrium and Holstein, 1997). The schedule served as a guide rather than a strict agenda and each interview required adaptation to that particular interaction (Mishler, 1986).

I completed fifteen interviews and transcribed them all. People responded favorably and steadily to wanting to interview with me in the beginning. After a few months, however, people's interest tapered off. I continued to ask people to schedule interviews with me after but did not have any responses for 6 months. Occasionally someone would come up to me at one of the meetings and say, "I

really need to set up a time to meet with you.” I followed those comments up with an email asking when a good time would be for them, but did not have any interviews scheduled for the last 6 months of my study. I would have preferred to have had more interviews as I think sitting down with the core twenty-five members who usually attended meetings would have helped me understand even more breadth of perspectives. However, I chose not to pressure them into talking with me or taking time out of their already pressed schedule. I think the perspectives I gathered represented those who were heavily involved in the partnership as well as those who came only once or twice each year. Also, I had a wide variety of stakeholder organizations represented in the interviews I did conduct. I think the interviews I completed were deep and allowed me a better understanding of how those participants felt about the partnership than I would have gathered through straight observation.

I transcribed the interviews for several reasons. First, the act of typing up the interaction allowed me more familiarity with the data. Second, once the interviews were typed they became much easier to analyze. Transcribing allowed me to reflect on the interviews as I worked with them. Third, having the interviews stored in my computer allowed me to keep many copies of the interview with different memos and coding. The interviews transcribed yielded 225 pages of single-spaced typed data. The transcriptions captured the central phrasing of the interviewees’ answers. My analysis was an interpretation of the discourse, not strict discourse analysis. By interpreting the discourse I mean that I was looking for reoccurring themes, content, not the structure of the talk. The

transcriptions were close to verbatim, however, so I had the ability to revisit the tapes if I needed more detail.

When meeting with each interviewee, I started by thanking them for sharing their time with me. I explained my research project, talked about confidentiality, and asked their permission to audiotape them. I said I would turn off the recorder at any time they requested. At that point, I asked them if they had any questions. I asked each of the interviewees to fill out a demographics sheet with their name, any pseudonym they wanted to be called (not one interviewee chose her own pseudonym), the date of the interview, stakeholder organization name, whether it was non-profit, for profit, public or otherwise, and gender. I only conducted interviews with women. I was unable to schedule interviews with men, but I do not think their absence is particularly important to this study. First, they were not a central part of the meetings. Second, I am not exploring gender differences, but intend to show the communication preferences of the population I did study. The demographic sheet also asked them to circle whether they were a voluntary or mandated participant of the public/private partnership, their position in their stakeholder organization as well as tenure, any positions they held in the partnership, their current position, length of time in that position and approximately how many hours each week they spent on partnership business. At the end of the demographics sheet there was a place for them to rate the success of their group on a scale from one to five, with one being unsuccessful and five as very successful. I alternated whether interviewees filled out the demographic questionnaire before or after their interview, and whether they rated the success of

the partnership before or after the interview as the timing may have affected their answer.

### *Organizational Texts*

Each meeting I attended usually included receiving many handouts such as an agenda, meeting minutes, and information about an upcoming training, workshop or event. Handouts came from the stakeholder organizations of the members, committees of the collaboration, and the coordinator. During a typical meeting, the coordinator handed out newspaper clippings on early childhood education topics, the newsletter from the council, petition postcards for state legislatures or information relevant to the council's mission. I wanted to include these types of organizational literature in my analysis because this medium is often chosen to espouse organizational preferences of communication. There are other reasons. First, the agenda shaped the way the meeting flowed. I wanted to understand who had input into deciding what was on the agenda, who was left off and why. Also, I wanted to understand what the participants thought about the way the meetings ran. Second, sometimes the participants voted to accept the previous month's meeting minutes at the beginning of the meeting. How did the person who typed the minutes capture the essence of what happened in the meeting? Did people ever challenge the minutes? What did the ritual of voting to accept the minutes do for the collaboration? Third, email traffic was a predominant way for this group to stay in touch. Often the agenda and minutes were included in the emails reminding people of the upcoming meeting, usually sent the day before the meeting. Back and forth replies to emails could generate a

conversation that I could then analyze for embedded preferences. Fourth, the other literature such as advertisements/posters about upcoming events, fact sheets, etc. all speak to how participants view the purpose of the partnership, the issues that are important to them and where they were spending their time and effort.

As an example, I will describe the handouts that came from one meeting. At the first one-day state meeting I attended where members from the state staff and all 18 county-based coordinators gathered, the day was a mixture of training and state business. Since this was the first meeting I attended, I am unsure if e-mails were sent ahead of time reminding people about the meeting. Agendas were distributed at the beginning of the meeting and included the purpose statement, desired outcomes and agenda for the day. One section of the training was devoted to consensus decision-making where the state level director passed out a booklet her office put together of internet resources on the subject. Another part of the training concentrated on how to frame messages. A consultant who worked on several political and union campaigns urging people to vote certain ways on issues gave an hour briefing on how to frame a message for the greatest impact. He brought several handouts from the campaigns he worked on to show examples of how to create leaflets, information sheets and postcards that people could sign and mail directly to their senators and Congresspeople. I think all of those documents including those handed out by various presenters gave me insight into the general philosophy of the group (or at least the people who set up the meetings) and were important for my analysis.

In the partnership's monthly meetings handouts came from members that they passed on to their coordinators. Several of the members worked in stakeholder organizations that tackled issues of early childhood education just as the collaboration did. One coordinator handed out an issue brief on specific statistics for our state's early childhood education. Another passed out childcare customer quarterly reports that showed by county how many people had called in for childcare referral. One pamphlet came from one of the community colleges advertising a conference for families and communities on how to raise healthier children. A different community college handed out flyers advertising an early childhood education orientation for those interested in joining the profession. The final handout from that meeting was a slide show and paper copy as well as a draft of part of the grant application for a significant grant helping improve children's readiness for school.

All of the documents showed what was important to the participants and to the council. They were filled with information about what was going on. Espoused preferences of communication were identifiable by what they said was important and how they said it. Also, the literature showed where these participants put their time and energy. Additionally, organizational literature painted a picture of participants' stakeholder organizations. Through research we try to understand as much as we can about the people involved in our site. One thing to consider is who makes up this group.

### *Participant Demographics*

Because diversity is an important part of an ideal collaboration, sometimes people assume that all collaborations have diverse participants. The site I studied was not diverse in many ways. The partnership has over forty members, but the monthly meetings usually have about 25 participants. The state level meetings, where many partnerships come together, have about 150 attendees. I attended two state-level meetings, but the bulk of my exposure was with my county-based group of which about 25 people attended, mostly white women. Table 4.1 shows some of the demographics of the group. I included this information to show that the group is not diverse and that any findings may not be able to be generalized to a larger population.

Table 1: Group Totals and Demographics

<u>Total number of subjects within scope of research project</u>		175
Monthly meeting group extended observation and/or formal interview		25
State meetings and/or training sessions, brief observation and informal interview		150
<u>Gender</u>	<u>Monthly group</u>	<u>State/training group</u>
Male	<1	13
Female	24	137
<u>Ethnicity</u>		
White/Caucasian	21	132
Hispanic/Latino	2	9
Black/African American	1	7
American Indian	1	2



### *Summary*

I gathered data over an eighteen-month time period (Oct 02-Apr 04). I logged a total of 99 research hours yielding 788 pages of single-spaced, typed pages of raw data.

Table 2: Summary of Data Gathered

Type of Data	Hours spent collecting data	Single-spaced typed pages
Fieldnotes from meetings, informal interviews, and training	30 hours in meetings 8 hours informal interviews 24 hours state mtgs/training total: 62 hours	180 pages 15 pages 20 pages
Videotaped meetings	12 hours	22 pages
Scheduled interviews, transcribed	~19 hours 15 interviews	225 pages
Organizational information-handouts, minutes, emails, surveys	~ 6 hours	~ 300 pages
Total	99 hours	788 pages

## DATA ANALYSIS

My data analysis included reading and rereading field notes, listening to audiotapes, watching and listening to videotapes, reading and rereading transcripts, and analyzing organizational literature. I constantly looked and listened for preferences of communication. Espoused preferences are often straightforward. People say or write explicitly how they think communicating in a certain way is important. The partnership participants talked about communication in a certain way that set up norms and expectations around what they thought were important. I observed espoused preferences in field notes, interviews and organizational literature. I made lists of espoused preferences and noted where they occurred any time people talked about the process of communicating. I organized these preferences by the heuristic introduced in chapter two. I will discuss more about analyzing the preferences after I explain how I drew out the embedded choices in people's interactions. The identification of embedded choices of communication can be more challenging.

Embedded preferences were identified primarily from watching videotaped meetings and also in field notes about observations of interaction. Participant's discourse within the meetings was also analyzed. Denzin (1997) wrote, "In discourse, cultural values are enacted and social structures come alive" (p. 38). Schwartzman (1989) pointed to meetings as a good place to look at organizational discourse and a key to interpreting events. Her study of an alternative mental health organization centered on their meetings. "First, and what is most important, an anthropology of meetings conceptualizes meetings as

communicative events (Hymes 1974) that must be examined as they are embedded within a sociocultural setting (an organization, a community, a society) as both a constituting and constitutive social form" (p. 34). In collaborations especially, where participants do not work together in the same organization nor does the collaboration usually have its own building or physical structure, the meeting becomes the only routine physical gathering of all of the participants. "Meetings are structured as an extended segment of organizational talk" (Boden, 1994).

As a communicative event, the communication practices people use within meetings provided a window into their worldviews about communication. Consider an example about conflict in meetings. People usually think about conflict and meetings in different ways. Some think meetings are a good place to resolve conflict. Many ways exist for them to resolve conflict. Some people will try to negotiate and work through differing opinions. Their communication practices would revolve around hearing the different sides of issues and coming to some resolution. Others might think that meetings are a good place to work out conflict. They think if people are allowed to "get things off their chest," they will feel better and be able to listen to other positions and work toward solving the problem. Their communication practices would include venting. Other people might think that conflict should be suppressed during meetings. Their communication practice would focus on what was commonly agreed upon in the meetings and ignoring or pushing aside controversial topics. Each of these practices are embedded with preferences that reflect a person's overarching view

of communication. For example, those who wanted to resolve conflict through exploring the other's feelings may reflect a humanistic psychological preference hoping that if everyone had the opportunity to say what they wanted, some would agree and resolution would be reached. The manner in which they resolved it would point toward their view. Those who believed conflict could help meetings reflect a strong democracy way of thinking. Their thought might be that conflict would foster diverse views enabling groups to make the best decision. They would not approach the development of conflict through arguing or trying to coerce others to take sides, but they would encourage different opinions to be voiced. Finally, those who believed conflict should be repressed and only common values should be talked about may be taking a unitary stance focusing their energy only on what was consensual. They would largely ignore anything that would create disharmony among participants. This is a hypothetical example of how talk in meetings could be analyzed and preferences drawn out from the talk could be compared to the heuristic. Meetings serve to reinforce the communication views people hold.

When participants engage in the construction of communicative events such as focused gatherings, they are also involved simultaneously in their interpretation and evaluation as cultural texts...In the process(or practice) of producing and reading meetings as texts, before, during, and after their occurrence, participants generate and affirm cultural values and beliefs or systems of meaning (Schwartzman, 1989, p. 36).

I would like to illustrate how preferences of communication can be found in talk. The following excerpt from the data I have gathered thus far is an example of how I did this.

### *Context of the example*

In order to better understand where this talk came from, I would like to introduce the two participants from my site and give a little of the context around this meeting. Karen is the full-time coordinator with the partnership. Estelle is one of the members of the executive board. Her title is facilitator of the partnership. Her stakeholder organization helps parents who have children birth to three years old with developmental concerns or special needs. Her organization connects these parents with service providers. At the time this meeting took place, Karen, Estelle and the secretary, Penny, were making the majority of decisions for the partnership. There was little input from the other participants or even the other board members. For example, when I interviewed the treasurer, she had never seen the checkbook or financial information about the partnership and had never been to an executive meeting. This excerpt is from a meeting that occurred in Spring of 03 before the annual meeting where the partnership invited a contracted facilitator to work on structure issues with the partnership. The bolded words were stressed in their talk.

### *Meeting Excerpt*

- 1       *Estelle:* Well I think Karen, what, what we talked about is that... I mean,
- 3       it's sort of like what are you facilitating, what do you put your arms around, and
- 4       ...it's a point of our organizational development to sort of re-norm, re-group and
- 5       kind of quit stalling... And um, **I** thought rather than working out some glo, goal
- 6       kinds of things again it might be good to use her time to help us sort of

7 restructure. I feel like we're at a point where **really** maybe what we're  
8 **more** about is this **partnership** for children, and then the **councils** could  
actually  
10 be more **specific**...I thought you know, maybe what we need to do is if we  
did  
11 have more structure, people would be a little clearer about their role when  
they  
12 came to the meetings and ...then we could also use those councils to be  
  
13 real effective in terms of interagency partnerships, things like that... I'm  
14 wondering if we did do it that way, if people would feel a little bit more  
15 ownership about it and take responsibilities. You know maybe we  
wouldn't have 16 this big group meeting every month. I mean maybe  
the councils would meet and 17 the committees would meet or  
something.  
18 *Karen:* We tried this. Some of you may remember we tried this whole  
thing that 19 we were going to meet one month and then the committees  
were going to meet  
20 the next month. And what **happened**, was that we met the one month and  
then the 21 next month nobody came and then next month. Or the  
committee would get  
22 together and the whole thing was the committee was supposed to have  
ownership 23 and then they would go oh great, here Karen, and they  
would hand me all this

- 24     stuff to do and it was like you know, I,I'm coordinating this whole thing,  
        I'm not
- 25     the committee coordinator, I can't be 12 committee coordinators so um it  
        didn't
- 26     work so please keep that it mind when we restructure, not to do that again.

### *Locating Preferences*

In this exchange, Estelle, the partnership facilitator, was talking to the whole council about becoming more structured. The preferences in her talk included structure, decentralization, moving the partnership forward, doing more, and encouraging ownership and responsibility for participants. Her communication practices embedded some of the same and some different preferences. She started out talking about missing the feeling of having her arms around what the council is doing. Her word choice of getting her arms around her work is like giving her work a hug (nurturing value). She felt like it was messy and she wanted it to be ordered and follow prescribed methods from a management class: the phrase "organizational development" and terms such as "renorming" allude to that. These words help identify her as someone with education who knows how to run a partnership and take it to the next level (value of education, experience, saavy in business). She felt the contracted facilitator could help do this. She had specific ideas about what direction the partnership needed to go to do the most good (values of effectiveness and efficiency). She felt if people had a stake and worked within their interest, they would be more involved (inclusion value). She wanted them to be involved. She thought the

group meetings every month were a waste of time and more could be done by breaking up into separate councils (preference for action over talk). She asked for feedback from the others (preference for other's opinions). Only Karen responds to her.

Karen responded but did not ask any questions. She reacted only to Estelle's points about not meeting every month. She left out the substantive issues of restructuring the partnership. She did not explore Estelle's point of view at all, but took an argumentative stance. She explained how every move of the council personally affects her and then returned back to her own agenda of passing something out. Karen's communication embedded a notion of liberal democracy in motion. She said that the partnership tried breaking from meeting once a month and nobody showed up. Then she argued how she got stuck with all of the work. The only need for a change in structure was to ease her workload. She seemed to need others appreciating how difficult her position was, how hard she worked, and how the council made her life harder.

Karen met Estelle's talk in a very specific way. The preferences embedded in her talk are evident through the choices she does not make and the options that do not happen. She wanted to be adversarial and believed it was her right to have an argument. She also believed because she is usually in charge, she could move the meeting on in whatever direction she saw fit. She gave no attempt at consensus. She did not try to find any points in which they agreed. She seemed to believe that since Estelle had her turn to talk, that was sufficient.



In addition to identifying preferences and working with them and the heuristic, another key part of analysis concerns consequences. I tracked when people made certain communication moves, what that practice did, and what consequences it had. I followed these moves not only within meetings, but also through email and field notes that captured informal conversations. From the example above, the conversation that day never returned to Estelle's concerns about the structure of the partnership until the annual structure meeting. Eleven months later, the partnership held its first monthly meeting where committees broke out into separate meetings to work on issues. At that point Karen was advertising the importance of running meetings that way.

#### *The Discovery of Clusters*

I discovered clusters of preferences within the data and then compared those back to the heuristic. The heuristic poses differences that might matter. For example, I asked participants what they saw as the purpose of communication, what does collaboration mean to them, how did they think decisions should be made, and how does decision making interface with communication. These are core differences that I paid attention to. While I formed clusters of preferences inductively, I paid attention to specific features such as those listed above. Once preferences were identified in the data, both espoused and embedded, I moved back and forth between my data and the heuristic. I used the data to engage and challenge the heuristic. I used a method of constant comparison. The heuristic established five interrelated principles of looking at how communication is supposed to work in the world. Using Glaser and Strauss' (1967) grounded

theory, I took note as significant patterns and concerns emerged from the data and cross-checked them against other accounts, my own observations and experiences, related literature (Douglas, 1976) and my heuristic.

The first stage of this method called for assigning data-text incidents to categories. I constantly moved back and forth between the principles and the data to see whether or not the five interrelated principles of the heuristic included the preferences found in people's every day communication. As I compared new examples to the heuristic, I constantly compared it to the original descriptions of the interrelated principles to determine if it was relevant. Simultaneously, I kept in mind that the description of the principles may change to include the expanded category with the new example in it. This was a cyclical process. "The analyst builds and he or she either reassigns problematic incidents to different categories or splits them off to form new categories" (Lindlof, 1995: p. 223). I went back and forth between the data and the heuristic constantly working on the description of the interrelated principles determining what was included in each one, their characteristics, properties, and parameters. Permeable boundaries existed around the interrelated principles throughout the process until finalization. At some point, the interrelated principles became full and new pieces of data added little. I also was aware peoples' every day communication practices may show something completely different from the interrelated principles within the heuristic, but that showed some coherency anyway. In this way, I used the data as way to refine the heuristic.

Preferences are very difficult to tease out of communication. The heuristic offered some help by being able to match like groups of preferences. For example, I did not count instances that the word "humanistic" came up. Rather I analyzed field notes, interview transcripts, organizational documents, and meeting videotapes to group together common preferences that belonged to a set of interrelated principles such as the humanistic psychological set. When people talk or write about making sure one another is heard, encouraging voice, supporting those who are quiet to speak up, trying to make people feel welcome and valued, these examples belong to the humanistic psychological cluster and provide a common way of looking at how communication should work within the partnership. If a different piece of data contains talk or words about representation, voting, individual's rights, that becomes part of the liberal democracy principles and points to a very different way of looking at the world. As mentioned before, some preferences may arise that do not fit neatly into one set or interrelated principles or another, they may fit in many or may be outside all of them and prompt a new set of principles to be formed.

I did not take it for granted that another researcher would develop the same sets of interrelated principles, nor describe them like I did. Nor do I assume that I developed all possible categories or even the most important ones. I can only say that my own knowledge and experience heavily influenced not only the way I gathered data, but also the way I analyzed it. Nonetheless, I think these interrelated principles are important things to identify. These interrelated principles are larger belief systems of how communication is supposed to work. I

used my knowledge as a native speaker to acknowledge these principles other native speakers might engage.

### WRITING THE REPORT

I investigated the preferences of communication embedded in people's talk. These underlying choices are there, but people generally do not have access to the language or deep structures that explain how they think and feel. In a sense I enacted strong democracy by trying to engage with them at a distance. I tried to have a long, slow dialogue, initiating conversation about how they talk and the consequences of the way they did it. Since I have no access to anything deeper than their talk, this was the action I chose to analyze.

A project that focuses on communication preferences must acknowledge that the researcher's own choices will affect the research. Denzin (1997) wrote that "self-reflexivity in ethnography is no longer a luxury" (p. xiii). Likewise, I cannot presume to be able to truly understand how participants within a public/private partnership think and feel. My interpretations of someone else's feelings are shaped by my own feelings and experience. So my research is the product of a white, middle-class woman in her thirties whose work exposure has mostly been with the military.

One of the founding fathers of ethnography, Malinowski (1922/1961), explained that in ethnography the task is to, "Find out the typical ways of thinking and feeling, corresponding to the institutions and culture of a given community and formulate the results in the most convincing way" (p.3; also quoted in Van Maanen, 1995b, p.6 and Denzin, 1997, p.xvi). This definition implies that the

researcher show how culture was mapped onto a person's cognitive structure. To some extent, I did what Malinowski (1922/1961) asked for. I looked at how people within a community, who belonged to various institutions, participated in a collaborative public/private partnership with its own organizational culture, and used native ways of thinking to communicate. But I found they did not have a typical way of doing so. Instead, I found them incredibly complex and inconsistent. I followed their struggle trying to capture their challenges with language that could articulate where they wanted to go and what they wanted to do. I found their communication incredibly messy and human. I found Malinowski's model does not work. People are more complex than this. A key part of unlocking this complexity is by understanding as well as a researcher can, how people think and feel as manifested in their talk.

The voice I wrote in is not operating from a strict realist regime by any means. I do not think I can "map the worlds of real experience" (Denzin, 1979, p. 265). I would not feel comfortable claiming I can report on what my participants were thinking and feeling in any definitive sense. Yet the process of asking people to be reflective about what they were thinking and feeling when they said something and how they understand their role in making the world a better place through a public/private partnership is key to my research. I tried to understand their worldview as it is expressed through their communication. My obsession with communication values and my own work sorting out their effects intends to "dig out" this often overlooked part of our daily communication practice and show people how powerful those choices can be. While my own preferences and

socio/historical position affected my analysis, I did not want to be the center of the study as these preferences develop their potency through interaction (as in a purely confessional tale, Van Maanen, 1988).

I wrote from the stance of a realist who acknowledged that she cannot "capture" the other's reality, but desperately wanted to understand it from direct interaction with the participants within the public/private partnership. The purpose is to expose the intricate preferences of communication that connect and divide us. These systems of choices are beyond the reach of many people who use normative communication practices every day. Our traditional ways of communicating may facilitate or work against our goals. Only by understanding the deeper structures in action, can we determine if our choices are the best.

The proposed site put no parameters on me as to what they would get out of my research. I felt I owed them something that would be helpful to them. When I first thought about this project I assumed I would write a report that would be very different from my dissertation and merely outline some interesting things that they said in order to get some of them out on the table. This group is just so nice; I have always felt that a little conflict would do them some good. But members of my committee helped me realize the information that would help them the most would be the deep, underlying choices that I found in their talk and the influence those preferences had on their communication and consequently on the partnership as a whole.

In this chapter I described the type of data I thought was necessary to answer the questions posed in the earlier chapters. I discussed the type of site that

would facilitate doing a study such as this one and showed my site as a good fit. I described the way I analyzed my data, found espoused and embedded preferences and compared them to the heuristic as a tentative theory about judging communication. I also described how I explored consequences of communication practices. Finally, I described my stance and how I wrote up this report. In the next chapter I describe my site, how it was formed, how it is organized, and the people who make it interesting.

## CHAPTER 5: EAST COUNTY PARTNERSHIP

This study occurred in a Western state of the United States which will be referred to as West State. In the late 1990s, Working Mother Magazine named this state one of the "Ten Best States for Child Care" three years in a row. The state governor at the time placed a great deal of emphasis on early childhood education and the state made several significant efforts in that vein to include the establishment of the Early Childhood Professional Standards Committee which proposed a systematic model for early childhood professional credentialing; establishment of the [State] Business and Child Care Council; establishment of a task force on Parent Education and Involvement ; establishment of the [State] Head Start Collaboration Project that brought together the state, Head Start, school systems, the child care community and other public and private partners; establishment of a statewide community-based resource center for child care; the Preschool Program which provided part-day preschool to disadvantaged four-year-olds; and finally, Legislative approval of the State Community Consolidated Child Care Pilots (Smart Start Technical Assistance Plan for West State), the focus of my study.

The State General Assembly established this public/private partnership and called it a community pilot program during the 1997 session to address the critical need for full-day, full-year child care services as a part of welfare reform. The Assembly stressed the importance of quality care for low-income children and their families. In September 1997, seventeen community consolidated childcare pilots working in thirty counties across the state were designated as pilots. Some



pilots, especially the more rural ones, were a combination of more than one county. The pilots were tasked with “ensuring collaboration among public and private stakeholders in the delivery of early childhood care and education” (State Department of Education, p. 1). The pilot program was tasked, however, to include certain program components, which made their task much broader than is captured in the aforementioned statement. Their program was to include: full day care and full year programs; educationally enriched programs; health screenings and follow-ups; parental education and home visits; nutritionally sound meals and snacks; services for children with special needs; staff development; family support services; and opportunities for the involvement of volunteers and extended family members to the delivery of child care services.

These pilot programs were created predominately to help low income families with childcare. Part of this need comes from a growing number of women in the workforce; the other part comes from the welfare to work program and the requirement for parents to work outside of the home. Today, in most cases, both parents have to work in order to make enough money to live. Unfortunately, with such a slow economy, many people have either lost their jobs, or had to take jobs with lower pay. Single-parent households often start at a disadvantage from a wage earning perspective. The poverty level is so low, it does not include the “luxury” of child care. According to Sonenstein et al.’s (2002) survey of American families, childcare easily costs about the same or more than sending your child to a public university. Subsidized childcare dollars are available, yet as is true with most programs, it is not funded to the level that

includes everyone. ABT Associates (2000) study of childcare for low-income families showed that only 11% of families who are eligible are receiving help from federal and state dollars (State Children's Campaign). The study showed a 7 to 1 ratio for dollars that the state would have to spend if one dollar was not spent in quality childcare programs. In another study, the Abecedarian Study, "intervention for low-income children in a high-quality center resulted in higher IQ scores, improved language, delayed parenthood and more (State Children's Campaign). A 2002 longitudinal study of Chicago's parent centers, where disadvantaged children could complete a program that helped them be young parents, found over the sixteen years of its existence that young parents were more likely to finish high school and less likely to be held back a grade, drop out completely or get arrested if they participated in the program. Participation in a quality early childhood development program as well as support from loving parents has been linked to better educational and social outcomes.

High quality childcare is not simply babysitting. If you really want to make a child care professional angry, just call them a "storage" facility for kids. Quality programs emphasize development, stimulating environments, opportunities for physical and cognitive development and school readiness programs. These programs also emphasize the importance of preparing young children for school. Several studies have shown the benefits of early childhood education. For example, the Perry Preschool Project illustrated that "quality preschool programs decreased the need for special schooling, increased employment, reduced welfare dependence and decreased crime."

*East County*

The specific county-based group I spent time with, East County, described itself this way in a newsletter. “[The East County pilot] originated in the Summer of 1997 as a result of state legislation that recognized the need for community agencies and individuals to collaborate at the local level to support the quality of early care and education for children and families” (2003, Fall, newsletter). Of course, the history of this particular group heavily influenced it. The group started when members from three different school districts who worked together on projects all the time, applied to the state for funding. They called themselves Western East County. For three years they worked together on projects confined to their three districts. In 2000, the state requested they extend their boundaries to the rest of the county, which was a huge addition and included a large city and many metropolitan and rural areas. East County includes a great deal of real estate. It was the first county established by the state. Spanning 850 square miles, it stretches from the state’s capitol to a neighboring state’s border. A diverse county, it includes mainly urban, but also residential, retail, office, industrial, agrarian and rural areas. With nine school districts, its population is over 500,000 people. The council only represented a small part of the geographical mass of the county. The Western and original part of the county was represented along with the major city in the county, but the outlying rural portion was not. While people who worked in early childhood education from those rural areas were contacted and informed about the council and invited to their meetings, it was just too far for them to go and the work the council was

doing mainly supported the people who regularly attended the meetings. The council, however, supported the idea that everyone in the county benefited from their work.

All licensed homes and centers in East County benefit from the work of [East County]. Members collaborate to strengthen the community by combining resources and working together on local issues. We apply for various grant funding to support quality programs through professional development, assessment, mini-grants for materials, and initiatives that increase our local capacity. Our vision is clear: Children's safety, health, and education is a priority in [East County] (newsletter, p.2).

In December of 03, the council began the process of filing for non-profit status (501C3). This would afford them many privileges including handling their own liability, being able to directly hire people and pay for services instead of having to go through one of the stakeholder organizations for those functions. In order to make the application process easier, they needed to be a partner-based group, rather than a member-based group. Although the council was always a public/private partnership, their terminology began to change in early 2004. They began referring to participants as partners and the council as a partnership.

#### *Structure of the Partnership*

The partnership has a coordinator, Karen, who holds the only full-time and funded position associated with the council. Their officers included a facilitator, a facilitator-elect, a secretary and a treasurer. After about six months of observing the group, I interviewed the coordinator first and then the officers. The facilitator, Estelle, is a strong and involved member of the group, while the facilitator elect, was active at one point, but resigned from her job in the middle of my tenure with the group. She named her replacement who was a natural selection for the

council yet he only came to one meeting before a reorganization at his stakeholder organization pushed him to bow out of the group. His replacement was also a member of the council and in talking to the facilitator informally one day before a meeting, she said she would be perfect to take over as the facilitator-elect but at that point had not expressed any desire to do so. The secretary, Penny, is a woman who was actively involved with the council for many years. She works in a state governmental office. The treasurer, Diana, is a manager of a church based childcare center and at the time of our interview had not been invited to take part in any type of executive committee meeting. She did not know how much money the organization had. The coordinator did all of the bookkeeping; she had never seen the organization's check book and was convinced that her position existed only in name but did not have any real responsibility associated with it.

Along with the elected officers, the partnership had an undetermined number of committees included in the structure. At the meeting where the contracted facilitator came in and conducted the yearly review of the council's structure and bylaws, it was almost amusing to hear what committees different members of the council thought were in place. Clearly the committees were not active or if they were, they did not report back to the larger council about what each committee was doing. After the annual meeting with the paid coordinator who addressed structure, the committees were set: the professional development committee worked on issues of training, scholarships, workshops, accreditation, and credentialing; the public policy committee covered legislative issues, networking, lobbyists, public speakers and position statements; the funding and

finance committee's primary responsibility included grant writing, donations, alignment with local business, and sponsorships; the communications committee wrote the newsletter, maintained the web-site, and intra and interorganizational communication. Additionally, the partnership has several standing grants with large budgets that they are involved with. One, the school readiness grant, is a \$643k grant that helps young children prepare for school. Another, the Project BLOOM (Building Leverage Opportunities and Ongoing Mechanisms for Children's Mental Health) grant, is a 6-year cooperative agreement for \$3M. It is designed to improve the way children with severe emotional disorders receive services and support. The Professional Development program is mainly comprised of the community evaluation team that conducts inspections, credentialing, etc of childcare facilities.

### *Membership*

The partnership is comprised of both mandatory and voluntary participants. The legislation mandated that certain organizations participate including the Department of Social Services, the school systems, the Department of Education, and the Department of Mental Health. Other members voluntarily joined the council for various reasons. Some of the other participants include: Care giver network, child development centers (public, private, and military); preschools; community colleges; County family child care association, County mental health networks, health centers, public schools, counseling services, before and after school programs, school nurse consultants, city governments, State division of child care, Head Start, parks and recreation, independent consultants,

child care training organizations, toy companies, child care resource and referral, YMCA, young parenting programs, and others.

For the first eleven months of its existence the council did not regulate who was a member. Their philosophy, according to the coordinator, was that anyone who wanted to be involved was welcome. The membership roster, consequently, had almost forty names while the people who attended the meetings averaged about twenty-three. When a person from an organization was delegated by the regular attendee to go to the meeting, that person's name was added to the membership list, emphasizing name rather than organization. It was not unusual to see three or four names from the same organization on the list of members. In October of 03, the council held a meeting specifically for membership purposes that provided a history of the group as well as an opportunity to join and the expectations for members of the council. This was a suggestion made by the paid consultant who facilitated the annual structural review of the council.

#### *Meet the Members*

Karen, the coordinator, was the only person on the partnership who was employed full-time to work on its business. The rest of the members worked in other organizations that either were mandated to participate in the council by the state legislature or volunteered because their jobs centered around issues of early childhood education. What I heard echoed throughout several of my interviews was that many people became involved with the council because others told them about it and said that their voice was needed at the meetings or that they could learn some information directly relevant to their job through the council. Karen is

an outgoing woman who is energetic and devoted to her job. She has worked in early childhood education as a day care provider, a teacher, and a school administrator. She enjoys politics and could see herself involved with politics in the future. She was the person I worked closest with and the one who invited me to do my research in her council. She was always warm and embracing, inviting me to feel at home with the council, ask questions, and join them for their meetings, training, workshops, etc.

The secretary, Penny, works for the state in providing assistance for low income families who need funding for child care. She was heavily involved with the partnership. During our interview she said that she was actually involved quite a bit more in the council's early days but was starting to pull out and "pass on" some of the work to the newer members. Penny is one of the older members of the partnership. She was at every meeting I attended for the first nine months or so taking notes and contributing to the conversation. I started seeing her less and less toward the end of my study.

Estelle, an articulate and polished woman who had a great deal of experience in the non-profit world, was a key player and heavily involved in the partnership. She was an elected officer who worked in a county job that consolidated services for families with young children. During our interview she expressed a desire for more structure and was personally responsible for hiring the paid facilitator who conducted the annual structural review of the council which encouraged the partners to think through what committees they thought the partnership needed and who was right for the committee. She and I saw each



other a lot at meetings and other functions related to the council. She told me how she thought the partnership was progressing. She was quite candid in her interview about how the officers in the partnership should not stay too long, but needed to rotate. Also, she explained how the coordinator took on more of a leadership role than she was actually qualified to do and how the partnership needed to be run more like a business and less like a community group.

The treasurer, Diana, was a woman who ran a church based child-care facility in the county. She came to only a few meetings and in my interview relayed her feelings of being left out, never invited to any of the executive committee meetings, never seeing the checkbook or a financial statement. She felt that the coordinator took on all of the responsibility for the partnership and did not let the elected officers do their jobs. She wanted to be involved with the partnership because her mentor, Wendy, a person involved with the partnership from its earliest days, thought it would be a good place for Diana to network and learn more about what was going on with early childhood education in East County.

Betty was one of the founding members of the partnership when it involved the Western part of the county. She was the director of a large childcare and school facility and had some health problems that forced her to miss several meetings. My interview with her was very telling because she knew so much of the group's history. She spoke candidly about the lack of formalization and even organization within the partnership. She felt that more people would attend the meetings that applied to them if the agenda was prepared more than the day

before the meeting and if the committee chairs or someone other than the facilitator and coordinator did all the talking. She made it clear that she did not have time to spend in a meeting talking about issues that revolved around other school districts or areas that did not include her. She was more in touch with the political nature of early childhood issues and more aware of the necessity to talk to city commissioners, representatives, and congressional liaisons about the issues in the state.

I first approached the people I saw as the main players, i.e. the coordinator, elected officers, and those who regularly attended the monthly meetings for interviews. I also, however, wanted to talk with those who did not attend all the time, partially to find out why. People who were previously heavily involved with the partnership and had stopped attending the meetings had different stories to tell than those who were always there. Similarly, people who came only once in a while did so for a specific reason that I wanted to find out. Why did people attend the meetings? Why did some and not others? How did they see their role within the council? How did they perceive its function, its daily operation, the other members? What role did they think communication played in the partnership?

I was able to meet with the partnership members in their own offices for most of the interviews, which helped me learn what they did in their stakeholder role as well as made it convenient for them. Interviewees worked all over the county, some in office buildings, schools, clinics, public buildings and childcare facilities. One interview I did was in a service organization that was having their

annual blood drive. I actually sat in a chair with a needle in my arm giving blood while chatting with one of the partnership members. While we had our scheduled interview after the blood bag was full, we did talk about early childhood issues while giving blood.

### *Typical meetings*

In chapter seven, I analyze partnership meetings. The description provided here is to give readers a general idea of how meetings worked. Partnership meetings were held monthly except for one month in the summer when most people in the education field were off work. In most cases they met at a library in their special functions room. Because the county was so big and spread out, finding a central meeting spot was difficult. The coordinator explained to me that the library was a central location. The meetings were scheduled from 1030-1230. The coordinator usually arrived earliest. She always had several boxes to carry. Some of the boxes were filled with handouts including the agenda and meeting minutes from the previous month. She also carried in bottled water, a cooler with ice, several snacks to include fruit, nuts, meat and cheese trays, candy and cookies. The room was set up with the tables taking up the largest portion. They were arranged in a square with chairs on the outside. There were almost never enough seats at the table so when people came in late (which they always did) they would pull up chairs behind the tables.

The coordinator always started the meetings off by having everyone present take turns introducing themselves and then answering some question she had come up with. This ritual took at least 15 minutes. For example, during one

meeting we introduced ourselves and then said where we were eating Thanksgiving dinner. Another time we talked about our favorite childhood toy, our favorite children's book, our favorite food, or some tid bit of information that was not the standard introduction which included your name and where you worked. At one meeting the coordinator asked us to talk about what was going on at our jobs and the introductions went much quicker than usual. The normal atmosphere of the meetings was laid back and informal with people rarely jumping in if they had something to say. Many members did not turn off their cell phones and they would ring quite often throughout the meeting. People would just answer the phone on their way out of the room to have their conversation. I found it extremely distracting, but nothing was ever said about cell phones in meetings and while some of the council members would look at the person receiving the phone call, their expressions were not enough to read how they felt about it.

At first, the meetings predominately consisted of the coordinator and elected officers doing most of the talking. They spoke about different projects the council was working on and it was more of an informational meeting instead of a venue where members could interact. The committees may have been in place, but not formally. Most members were unfamiliar with the various committees and there was no report from the committees back to the general membership. The secretary took notes, the facilitator briefed some of the grant programs the council was currently working on and the coordinator spoke the majority of the time as her full-time job was doing work for the council. While designed as more

of an administrative role, she actually was making decisions and running the organization as I saw it. Deeper into my study, the meetings became more decentralized. The coordinator would start the meetings but then the committees broke off into their own meetings. The committee chairs ran the meeting and the coordinator went from room to room "visiting" each committee meeting for a few minutes.

The attendees at the meetings changed consistently. The coordinator was always there and the facilitator most of the time, the other members changed. The roster of partnership membership showed approximately 60 members, but the average attendance for the meetings I attended was about twenty-five. There were definitely familiar faces, a core of regulars who seem to have a stronger interest and willingness to work and be involved in the council. These were the members who ended up as committee chairs and people working on specific grants.

After the initial introductions, the coordinator would give people a few minutes to read over the previous months' minutes and then vote to accept the minutes. The agenda for the rest of the meeting usually involved four or five topics that the coordinator would run down. Sometimes the partnership would invite people from outside the membership to come in and give a presentation. These were generally informational in nature and seemed to be whenever another organization would volunteer as opposed to something the council specifically sought out.

### *Partnership Projects*

The partnership was involved with several projects listed here. Some have been specifically referred to above and some have not. In the annual structure meeting with the contracted facilitator, the coordinator brought up the point that the partnership should establish its own agenda as opposed to merely responding to grant proposals. Her point was to consider projects on their merit, not simply whether or not they had money associated with them. These are some of the projects the partnership was involved with during my tenure:

*Resource Center and Library:* They took donations and used some grant money to develop a resource center housed at a community college where childcare providers, parents, students, etc. could check out different types of material about early childhood education.

*Training:* The partnership put on a large training session once a year called the Quality Forum as well as several other training sessions in subjects around early childhood education. They sponsored and advertised CPR, medication administration, caregiving, mental health, development, and safety.

*School Readiness:* This was a grant to improve the quality of early care and education for children under five and better prepare them to enter elementary school.

*Project BLOOM:* This was a grant to improve services for severely emotionally disturbed children.

*Scholarship:* The partnership provides money for individuals from licensed childcare homes/centers seeking their Certificate of Director Qualification. The

scholarships cover the cost of required three-credit courses as well as \$50.00 toward the cost of books. Recipients attend community colleges.

*Donut discussions:* Public relations opportunities for community leaders and elected officials to discuss the importance of programs that benefit children (usually done over breakfast donuts at a childcare center).

*Sharing Student Success:* This is a luncheon held to highlight the importance of afterschool programs during the nationwide Lights On! Afterschool Campaign

### SUMMARY

In this chapter I described some of the issues around early childhood education and its importance. My site, a collaborative public/private partnership, was developed specifically to work on issues relating to early childhood education in a specific county. I described the way my group and the other seventeen like it in the state were started. I also described the structure of the partnership, introduced the reader to many of the key players, and described a typical meeting. Finally, I provided a list of some of the projects this group is working on. This partnership relies on the hard work, dedication and creativity of its members. In the following chapters I will analyze different types of data around this partnership. The most attention will be on the preferences of communication found embedded in the micropractices of the partnership meetings as well as the espoused preferences from the interviews. It is my intention to expose the deep underlying structures of the partner's talk with hopes that seeing and understanding that might help them in their collaboration.





## CHAPTER 6: ESPOUSED AND EMBEDDED PREFERENCES IN INTERVIEWS

While we ask and answer questions all the time in our every day life, an interview is much different than a naturally occurring conversation. Answers are affected by who asks the questions, the interviewers' relationship with the person answering the questions, and the type of questions asked. This chapter analyses interviews with the explicit purpose of finding out how the partnership members talk about the partnership and its meetings during interviews. This chapter and the next tackle the first four questions core to this dissertation. The first question is, "How do people see collaboration? How does it link to communication?" I will describe how people defined collaboration and talked about it as well as the relationship they saw between communication and collaboration. The second question is, "How, when, and by whom are espoused preferences of communication expressed in a collaborative process?" I will describe the person (all female interviewees) who espoused a certain preference of communication, her role in the partnership, when in the interview, and how the espousal came about such as what that person said and the context around the comment. The third and fourth questions will be answered in the next chapter about meetings. While this chapter focuses on the what is said in interviews about meetings, the next chapter focuses on the process of meetings.

In this study I treated the scheduled interviews as a conversation. I asked participants about normative judgments in how they communicate. I want to know how they judge whether communication is good and bad. My hope in these

interviews is to see how people's talk implicates their preferences. I am interested in how they express norms about meetings in interviews.

One way we can dig more deeply into people's communication is by analyzing whom the person is who is talking, the context around his or her specific talk, and the time he or she spoke. This will illuminate the larger set of preferences in their talk about meetings. For example, if a person asked for increased participation within a group, I would look at who that person is, their role within the group, what question I asked them that they responded in this certain way, what I have observed them doing and saying in meetings and other places, and what our conversation has been like in the past. I would look at the way they made the statement, their tone, and their emotion. Keep in mind, an interview has its own "rules" of normative communication that have to be considered when attempting to understand how people think about communication. By engaging in an interview as an action, people accept certain communicative norms such as turn taking. People answer questions the way they think the interviewer wants them to or in a way that gives the interviewer the information the interviewee thinks they need. The language used in the questions may be repeated in the answers. Some people will be more comfortable and willing to talk than others. Trust is an issue. Answers to questions in an interview have an appropriate length that people keep in mind. Interviewers tend to ask more broad, easy to answer questions first, and then move on to more personal questions once rapport is built. Interviews are a way of communicating which is one part of the context and also a potential limitation that must be taken

into account when analyzing people's preferences of communication. My goal is not to analyze the norms of how they answer questions in an interview, but to analyze how they espouse their communication preferences about meetings. People's talk indicates their preferences for giving a certain appearance over another. Their assessment of partnership meetings and whether they think a specific instance of communication was good or bad implicates a larger cluster of preferences of communication. It tells us something about how they think communication should work.

One question that arises is whether or not the choices we make about communication are situational. Do people pick and choose their communication preferences to fit the specifics of a given context? Will the partnership members give different preferences for communication based on their level of involvement? Through careful analysis of interviews and meetings, I will work to answer these questions.

I approached the analysis of my data by constant comparative method. Through that method, I discovered three clusters of preferences of communication. These clusters are logics people used to judge communication. If the communication was close to their choice of how it should be, they considered it to be good. If the communication was far away from what they considered the "right" way communication should work, it was considered bad. These clusters represent predominate preferences for thinking about and performing communication. These clusters are an information view, a task view, and a relationship view of communication. The information view comes from

people who judge good communication as the transmission of information. The task view comes from people who have a preference for completing a task through communication, some times a decision-making task. Finally, the relationship view comes from people who prefer to think of communication as a means to build relationships between people. The clusters arose from values people espoused or had embedded within their talk during our interview. They are neither neat, nor exclusionary, but complex ways of trying to understand the inconsistent motifs of people's preferences of communication within interviews and the larger consequences of their preferences on a public/private partnership.

Much of the talk during the interviews was not specifically about the process of communication. More of the talk focused on personalities and structure as opposed to communication. While they all looked to structure as the answer to their problems, they had very different ideas about what structure meant and what it was supposed to do. Owing to their specific conception of communication, I found in my interviews, they did not see collaboration or structure as necessarily associated with communication. They did, however, have preferences about the idea of collaboration such as thinking meeting face-to-face is important. They also thought that meetings should be productive as well as create an atmosphere that makes people feel welcome. They also have preferences about structure but they do not think of them in terms of communication. Structure meant more formalized meetings to some people, and the creation of job titles and positions to others. I begin with the information cluster because it is was the one preference of communication that was espoused

by most partnership members across the board. It is the most consolidated and reoccurring preference from the interviews. This first cluster is defined and described below with examples of who brought it up, where, when, and how it emerged.

### INFORMATION

Different members expressed information as a value of communication in different ways. Those who were minimally involved in the partnership wanted information and were satisfied with what they were receiving. One executive board member thought that information should be more selectively given to members based on their interests. Some members took issue with information that only came from the coordinator. Other members found it important everyone receive the same information at the same time. Regardless of their specific idea about information, all of the preferences that form this cluster associated good communication with information.

#### *Information as Sufficient in and of Itself*

The less involved members of the partnership primarily addressed the need for information. These are the members I saw one time or less at the meetings, or people who others referred to as having attended meetings regularly at one point, but no longer. I wanted to find out why people came to the meetings, as well as why they stopped coming. How much did communication have to do with their choice to come to meetings or not to come? In the interviews they explained their involvement in the partnership was because they wanted to know the current issues in early childhood education and felt that a

group of people involved in the same business would be a good source of networking and information. For this group of members who were less involved, information was the most important reason for them to be a part of the partnership.

The group of minimally involved people was very satisfied with the communication within the partnership. They associated good communication with information and therefore as long as they felt like they were receiving good information, they were satisfied with their experience. They had no issues with the fact that Karen, the coordinator, did the majority of talking in meetings and that the information came predominately from her. One example of how a minimally involved person defined collaboration helped me understand why this group of members thought information was important and why they thought the partnership was so successful. She defined collaboration as, "Well, it's just the community coming together collaborating, ah, giving information or you know from or to outside sources to make the program a better place "(interview with Alice). Note how she defined collaboration as giving information, not sharing or comparing, but giving, denoting a one-way relationship. The minimally involved people in this group were happy listening to one person who passed the information down to them. Usually, that person was the coordinator. They did not want more.

These members of the council attended meetings when there was something that interested them. Otherwise, they did not attend. Because the agenda was often sent out the day before the meeting, they did not attend because

they did not have enough notice to know if the topics were interesting to them. If there was a specific problem they needed the partnership for they would attend. Each of these "lesser" involved people rated the council a "5" out of "5" when asked about the success of their group. For example, Natalie, a member from a military childcare facility within the county, answered my third question, which was what she thought the purpose of the partnership was.

Joann and I, then the childcare coordinator went to that first one [meeting] um and I was like wow, I was impressed because it was so much information, so much useful information and I took a whole bunch of notes, brought them back here and started pushing a lot of issues with our staff to attend workshops and here are the subsidies, here are the grants available for training um (interview with Natalie).

Natalie did not come to any of the meetings over the eighteen months I studied the partnership. In her interview, she was reflecting on the times she came in the past. She told me she was heavily involved with the partnership while working on a waiver that would allow her child development program on the military base to be certified by the state. Once that waiver was awarded, her need for a specific bit of technical information was satiated. She received a specific benefit for her program, her expectations were met by the partnership and she considered the information she received from the meetings useful at the time. At the time of our interview, she was done with the partnership. One way to think about organizing Natalie's comments is to test its fit in the rational/argumentative/informational interrelated principles. Because Natalie's comments imply that she evaluates good communication based on information flow, the larger cluster helps us better understand Natalie's overarching picture of how communication works. This

transmission view of communication prioritizes information from a credible source and does not prioritize other values such as sharing, human interaction, representation or strong democracy. Other more involved members, not only the less involved people, however, also addressed the need for information.

*Information as Selectively Given Out for People to Take Home*

Information was thought to be an important part of communication for executive board members as well as those minimally involved. The normative view of some of the executive board members was that it was their responsibility to rationally select what information went to whom.

One member of the executive board felt that the information going out to the general membership should be more selective. When I asked about how communication worked in the partnership, Estelle, an executive board member, and representative from a service organization, criticized Karen's, the coordinator, way of telling the partnership members everything. She espoused a preference for choosing what information to share with whom so that they would have information pertinent to their stakeholder organization to take back to them.

She's [Karen] really good, I guess the only thing I could fault her on with that is that sometimes choosing her audience. I mean really knowing which information to get to which people and I think she tends to do broadcast communication, you know, just get everything out and I think that sometimes confuses people and is overwhelming. I think some people that go to that meeting so um, so maybe erroring on too much information but I think that meeting agendas, directions, those kinds of things that can be roadblocks she does a really good job on... I think that the bad things is what I mentioned before, having discretion around knowing what, what to communicate to who. And how much information people need and part of that will hopefully come around with the new work on structure (interview with Estelle).



While Estelle chose a bit of a different slant when she talked about her preference of communication, just as the examples above, she evaluates Karen's communication by the way she transmits information. Estelle preferred selective information go to certain people so they could take it back to their stakeholder organizations. Just like the minimally involved people who were satisfied with receiving information, Estelle's normative judgments about communication were based on a view of information needs.

Estelle's notion of how information should be selectively given to the general membership fits the rational/argumentative/informational set of interrelated principles. She felt that people needed to be better informed to take information home. This is very different than if she thought the general membership needed to be better informed so that they could make decisions, or be more collaborative. Hers is a specific way of understanding communication. To her, collaboration is a way to get information out to people.

Executive board members, especially those who had been around before the council had a full-time coordinator, thought that Karen's role as information coordinator was crucial. Where they parted ways of practicing normative communication was that some executive board members such as Estelle felt they should be selective about giving information to the partnership members, while other executive board members felt that the partnership was completely in the dark because the board made all the decisions without ever consulting the membership. Some members also felt they should receive all of the information and be allowed to sort out what they did or did not need on their own. For

example, Penny, the secretary and an executive board member, felt strongly that the executive board was making all of the decisions and not giving enough information back to the general membership. Still, Penny did not assert that the members should be given information in order to participate in the decision-making, only that they be made aware of the executive board's decisions. She thought the membership should have access to the same information as the board to take back to their stakeholder organizations.

These aforementioned views on collaboration as a way of giving out information were very different than what the legislation creating the partnership set forth. It called for collaboration among public and private stakeholders to solve the problem of early childhood education in the county. This included addressing the problem, creating a plan of what a comprehensive program should look like, and identifying resources and policies that would make the program sustainable. It was not designed as a clearinghouse for information, but as a place to make decisions that improved the quality of early childhood education.

While some members pushed the idea of information one step further, they still based their judgment about what was good communication on whether or not information was effectively transmitted. They found it problematic that all of the communication came from a single person. They thought they could get better information if it came from more than one person.

*Information as Credible if it Comes from More than One Source*

They felt that the coordinator, Karen, controlled the flow of information and did so with the help of the executive board and little input from the rest of the

members. They took issue with the top-down nature of the information flow. It was not only that they wanted information from more than just Karen, but also they noticed that the information did not flow back around to the partnership as it would in a circle and that there was not much communication between people. The top-down communication ensured that only specific information and in the minds of many of the members, insufficient information, reached the rest of them. These responses came to my question about how communication worked within the partnership.

Holly, a member for about six months at the time of our interview, said information seemed to be controlled by a few members of the partnership. When I asked her how communication worked she said,

Pretty well, I think it's more, you receive a lot more from [Karen] and [Estelle] and there's not a whole lot in between like I don't have an email list with all of the council members on it and it's probably just because I'm new but it would be helpful if I had that, I know if I asked [Karen], she'd send it to me. But a lot of it seems to flow through that central point (interview with Holly, PhD, member from a service organization helping all ages with mental challenges).

Holly's statement espoused the preference for lateral communication. She did not say that she wanted the list of other council members to make a collective decision or to build a relationship with, but that she thought information from the members, not only from the executive board would be helpful. Others perceived the importance of the same information going to everyone at the same time.

#### *Information as an equalizer*

Jane, the contracted facilitator who ran the annual meeting, espoused the ideal of having everyone hear information at the same time as well as having

consistent representation. In this view, information needed to be given equally to everyone so that some people did not have an advantage over others.

We know one of the main uh precepts of communication is that everyone needs to be at the same communication level you know we need to know the same things at the same time. Like I said earlier that's the reason I want to meet with all these committee chairmen at the same time; I want them to hear me say it, a a all together so that is um that is one difficulty of um of this kind of structure and issue is is to put up for discussion and ultimately a vote and you've never been here before and you're saying so tell me about this and tell me about that and the people who have been there for every meeting and the people who have read their supportive material are beginning to get a little antsy (interview with Jane).

Jane's view comes from the rational/argumentative/informational interrelated principles. She sees communication as a strategic tool; one that can be leveraged for power, therefore, the only way to keep things fair within a group is to ensure that everyone receives the same information at the same time. Again this is just information for people to take home. While Jane prefers that people attend meetings regularly so that information can consistently be updated and not repeated, she does not frame it as a prerequisite to decision-making.

### *The Turn to Structure*

The members and executive board perceived the way to fix these problems with regard to information was through attention to structure. The general membership who espoused preferences of communication around information saw structure as networking. Ideas about improving the information flow was presented as encouraging information sharing between general members, not just having it come from the executive board. They decided that could happen more easily if roles were better defined. The executive board members who saw the

partnership as an information clearinghouse, saw structure as a way to get the information out more efficiently. Each person had a vision of what communication should look like in the partnership, but they did not see their system flaws as communication problems. They decided to devote their annual meeting to the issue of structure, to revamp the committees in an attempt to improve information flow. Each of the other clusters I discovered during the interviews also called for a turn to structure, but with very different ideas about how structure would change the partnership.

Everyone I interviewed expressed that one reason they were involved in the partnership was for new information about early childhood education. They all perceived that good communication meant information was transmitted. Yet people espoused different preferences about that information. In this information cluster we see at least four things happening. First, we see a relationship between the “less” involved members and their desire for information only, nothing more. This preference ties back to the rational/argumentative/information interrelated principles from the heuristic proposed in chapter two. It values “imparting,” “sending,” “transmitting,” or “giving information to others” (Carey, 1989, p. 15). Second, we see the paradox between opinions of the executive board. One executive board member thought the coordinator should do a better job of selecting what information goes to whom so that they could take it home. The other executive board member felt that the general membership should be aware of what the executive board knew. These are two different approaches to information, but still an agreement that good communication is about information

transmission. Third, we see some members as wanting all of the information and having the responsibility to sort out for themselves what they do and do not need. This view reflects the rational/argumentative/informational interrelated principles. The logic follows if people know all of the facts and they engage in true and open debate, the truth will emerge. Fourth, we see information as an equalizer used to put everyone at the same level to maintain a flat hierarchy and not give any power advantage to someone who knows more. This view also reflects the rational/argumentative/informational interrelated principles. Those who employ information in this way, do so to apply leverage to an interaction. The more you know, the more you can persuade others. While this group would not espouse that any of its members should have leverage over others, they use information as a way of "leveling the field," so that will not happen. Finally, the look to structure to improve the way information flows illuminates their normative view of communication. This view also reflects the rational/argumentative/informational interrelated principles. Again, it shows a commitment to changing the organization for the most efficient transmission of information as the highest value of communication.

Clustering preferences of communication shows different ways of looking at how communication should work. This particular "information" cluster serves as a constellation of different ways to judge good communication as based on information. It also points back to the rational/argumentative/informational interrelated principles. By knowing this, we can better understand the ideas people had about communication who espoused preferences that belonged to this

cluster. All of the clusters of preferences of communication had partnership members who saw communication problems as structure problems. The partnership did not lay out explicit process rules about communication. They looked to structure as the answer to their problems. This was evident throughout my eighteen months with this partnership.

The idea of structure holds embedded preferences that things need to be more formalized and organized; people need explicit jobs and the partnership needs to be set-up in a certain way. The structure they developed started with the executive board being comprised of the coordinator, the four elected positions of facilitator-elect, vice facilitator, treasurer and secretary, and the five committee chairs. The committee embers comprised the rest of the structure. While some of these committees were in existence before, they did not meet regularly and most of the members of the partnership did not know they existed. The annual structure meeting defined them and re-established them as necessary for the partnership. Every member who was involved in the partnership was supposed to choose the committee on which they wanted to serve. This goes directly against what many of the “lesser” involved members told me they liked about the partnership in our interviews. They were satisfied attending meetings, listening to the information presented, and not becoming any more involved. The annual meeting that changed the structure and required everyone to participate would root out those people.

While the coordinator was the only full-time position, the elected positions were designed to rotate. I was only involved with this group long enough to see

one set of its leadership. This particular executive board had the four members and only added the committee chairs within the last few months. The treasurer, however, had never attended an executive board meeting when I interviewed her. The facilitator-elect position changed people three times and was vacant for much of my time at the site. They looked to structure to help them solve these problems.

Different levels are shown in this cluster. Some members, speaking for themselves in the interview, espoused their desire for information. These were generally the "lesser" involved people. Other members who wanted to be more involved or who were speaking from their responsibility to the other members of the partnership, wanted a more inclusive group where people share information from their various stakeholders and experiences and then the best decision is made for the entire council. Other executive board members thought information should be selectively given to partnership members. Others saw information as a value of communication when used as an equalizer, ensuring everyone received the same information at the same time and in the same manner.

There seems to be a connection between the level of desired involvement with the partnership and the desire for more than just information. But it is not along a continuum. While all members want information, some members ONLY want information. They are the lesser involved. Regardless, it was fairly easy to see people's preferences for information coming out of the interview process. What was more difficult, was to be able to name how other members wanted to influence the direction of the group, policy, and early childhood education in



general. This idea will be explored in the next section of this chapter entitled “decision making.” Other members wanted to be more involved and needed to feel a sense of belonging; they wanted to be a part of the group and had a desire to make changes in early childhood education. This idea will be explored in the section called “relationships” in this chapter.

### DECISION-MAKING

Talk about accomplishing tasks as preferences of communication emerged from interviews. This cluster encompasses people’s preferences of communication around working on projects, applying for grants, making decisions, and voting. Because a person espoused a preference for working on one task such as being a part of a project, did not necessarily mean they wanted to be involved in another task, such as being part of making decisions about the partnership’s direction. These statements came from people who wanted to be heavily involved in the partnership, but did not feel that they were fully participating because they were not involved in accomplishing something or making a decision. Naming this cluster of preferences was highly problematic. While people talked about their normative judgments of communication being based on action, doing something, accomplishing something, or making decisions, they seemed to be struggling for a language that conveyed what they meant. The members who espoused preferences of information were much better equipped with their vocabulary. This shows the dominance of information transmission as a way of thinking. The idea that communication is good when information is being relayed is a part of all of our experiences at home and work and is familiar

to most of us. The idea that communication is good when something is being accomplished is much more fuzzy and difficult to get our arms around. I too found myself struggling to name this cluster of preferences of communication with a word that did not carry too much "baggage," leave out an idea or narrowly constrain it.

The fundamental judgment about communication being good was if things were getting done, if the talk was accomplishing something. Some of the members whose preferences belonged here were original members of the partnership from before it was able to hire a full-time coordinator and before it spread to the large city within the county. In other words, they had been heavily involved in the partnership at one point and felt that because they were no longer doing as much as they once had, they were not satisfied. Some wanted more involvement and responsibility. In the meetings, very few people other than the hired coordinator spoke so those who used to run the meetings had quite an adjustment. Despite their energy and passion, one problem was they were ill equipped to know what direction the partnership should take. They did not have the skills, training, or tools necessary to determine how to make a collaboration work. Therefore, much of what they talked about was ambiguous. These people associated good communication as much more than simple transmission of information. To them good communication was the ability for them to be part of a community, to have a set of core values from which to make decisions, solve problems, work on things, and improve the quality of early education. They were not sure what this idea would look like in practice. Most of them did not have the

background or experience and thus were powerless to enact skills that would allow them to articulate what it was they wanted. They never framed this as a communication problem or the inability to get the words out, yet it frustrated them.

*Preferences of Communication for Decision-Making and Voting*

A striking example of someone who really wanted to be involved and engaged in the partnership was the treasurer, Diana. Yet she was not allowed to have any responsibility for the partnership's money. Diana was a newly elected treasurer at the time I interviewed her. Her stakeholder organization was a faith-based child development center that she directed. She thought being a member of the executive council would afford her more influence within the partnership. In fact, she received that advice from a senior member of the partnership. Her answer to my question about how decisions are made showed her frustration with the lack of voting she had been involved with in regard to the partnership.

I very rarely ever remember voting on anything. You know like Robert's Rules of ...I don't know how decisions are made. I assume that it's [Karen], [Estelle], [Betty], and [Penny] (the executive board), that they make decisions but it might be just Karen. (laughs). Because it's not the executive committee or else the executive committee minus the treasurer (laughs). I have no idea (interview with Diana).

Her involvement with the partnership was meaningful to her if she could influence it. Without a direct hand in decision-making and helping her community, her perception of how communication worked in the partnership was negative.

One interesting point about Diana's statement of frustration with not knowing how decisions are made is that this particular preference of communication does not appear to be a strategic move for her. She does not appear to be drawing on the fact that she would work hard if only she were included in the decision-making process because it would make her look good. It appeared out of frustration as she was trying to figure out how this thing they call collaboration or a partnership is supposed to work. She took the job as treasurer to be actively involved and yet she was not. She told me that she wanted to be involved in decision-making so that she could make a difference for children in her community. She also talked about a preference for being a part of the group, which I will explain in the next section of this chapter on relationship. Conceptually, we can see Diana evoking two logics and preferences of communication depending on the situation.

Betty, who ran the group before the full time coordinator position was funded, brought up a different twist with regard to decision-making. She espoused the importance of process rules of communication using the example of decision-making. When talking about how to run the group, she said, "I think it has a lot to do with style and I have learned you know from stuff years ago, you learn a lot, and one of the things you learn is that if you don't define how decisions are made then those decisions can be made again." Betty related her perception that it was important for the partnership to talk about how decisions were made so they agreed and followed that procedure. Here a unified stance on how decisions should be made within the partnership is important to the members.

Otherwise, if the decisions were made without the buy in of the group, those decisions could be made again. Betty recognized this was something they needed to talk about, but she was struggling to identify what was missing. The idea she did get across was that regardless of how they decided to make decisions, they all had to buy into that decision or it would never stick. This preference for a specific type of communication points back to the Unitarian interrelated preferences. As long as people are unified in how they will conduct the decision-making process, they will live with that decision. Otherwise, they will rebel against it.

Recall from the information cluster that only half of the executive board felt the rest of the council needed to be involved in decision-making. The other half felt strategically deciding what information people had to take home was the job of the executive board. If the partnership were to talk about process rules of communication including decision-making, these differing views would be brought up and a more communitarian approach would be taken. As a group, they would decide what the best communication process was for the overall good of the group.

The secretary, Penny, further complicated the preference for decision-making in communication. While she explained the current practice was for the executive board to make decisions, she thought it was wrong the board did not bring the decision back to the larger group. She did not feel the executive board did a good job communicating with the rest of the partnership. She said,

I've seen it yeah, like, we decide this and then the few of us who are on that executive group and we sort of just designate it as that and we sort of

just did and it's too big to go to 40 people every time you have to make a decision about whether to spend something or not so we sort of do that to keep everything running and yet the weakness is that we're not answering, we should be answerable to that larger council... The state pretty much communicates with [Karen] who then communicated with the rest of us and I think that's actually a problem because then she tells the executive committee and we think ok, we're familiar with all this stuff that's going on. I think we forget that the larger council, the 30 or 40 people that show up every month haven't heard everything we've heard. I don't think we're very good at filling them in or I think at those general meeting we should literally ask for permission is this something the council should be involved in. Sometimes we just lean forward so the communication um mainly through [Karen] and I think thank God she's keeping people informed but we probably should get better at that (interview with Penny). Penny believed the job of decision-making should be shared with all of the

members of the partnership, not isolated within the executive board. She sensed the frustration of the general members commenting that they probably feel they are on the "outside" and "don't have much say" within the partnership. In this way, Penny espoused involvement in decision-making as a good and necessary part of communication. She knew that she would feel left out if not involved in decision-making just as she knew the rest of the membership not on the executive board felt left out of decision making. These sentiments were reflected by some of the membership.

Another member of the executive board recognized the need to include the rest of the partnership, not just the executive board, in on decisions.

That has been something I've been worrying about because I sit there and I watch expressions and I can see that people are lost and I think oh yeah we forgot to tell them that (laughs). It shouldn't come as a surprise. The way it should work is that we present things to that council and then we vote, and then we drop it and it would be hard for us to drop it. And I think that's what we forget is that we really are answerable to a much larger group and that's the only way collaboration can work. It's not just about, you get caught in your own power and what I want to do and we can do and we kinda (laughs) get away from that. There's a core group that's always there and things just happen. It's kind of like things are

miraculous all most. (laughs) We just create things and we can dream. I think that the big difference is that the council and it's mandated to try to find ways to break down barriers it's a wonderful group so it's a totally loose, the structure is much looser and we have to work at the communication. Communication, I think, is the key to the whole thing and we have to work at it. We have to get back to realizing we're bigger now, and we have to talk, communicate much more with all the parties involved and make sure it's not just the 2 agencies that want these projects but it's the entire board. If the tensions build up, we'll lose people that we really need. I think people may resent some of that leadership but it just, I don't know, it does appear that way to me so that, that, we're just doing things and making decisions, I'm not sure. We have to get our decision-making in a better way (interview with Jenny).

Here we see an excellent example of the member's struggle to articulate what their charter is, exactly what the legislature that established their partnership intended, and how they were supposed to be organized and work toward their goal. It is complicated and difficult to verbalize, but people know that a feeling of togetherness is missing and that collaboration is supposed to be more about working together than excluding people from decision-making. Decision-making may be the one "task" they know groups are supposed to do so they tend to use it as an example.

Partnership members talked a great deal about decision-making. On a spectrum of an individual acting alone on one end and consensus on the other end, some people talked a bit about decision making in the middle where more people should be involved in making decisions. But they did not know how to facilitate something with more involvement. In our interviews, some members brought up including the right people as a key part of decision-making.

*The Right Way to Work on a Project*

As part of this decision-making cluster, and the preference for communication around accomplishing something, some members espoused their preference for including additional representation when necessary. Estelle was the facilitator-elect whom many other members referred to, as the most “sophisticated” member of the board because she had experience in the non-profit world, was eloquent and well dressed. She talked about seeking out representation that was missing on a particular grant and going after it. The school readiness grant was the biggest grant the partnership had ever won at over \$600k. “When this whole school readiness thing started we said we need you guys at the table, we need your involvement you know and we really, really reached out to them but other than that I can’t remember another specific group we really had to do that with” (interview with Estelle). While it is unclear what the terms of the involvement were, it is evident that Estelle felt it was necessary for this particular project to “reach out” to a specific group or a subgroup of the partnership and involve them in some way. She also said that she did not remember having to “reach out” before.

This could mean at least two different things. First, it could mean that normally, the board could make the decisions but in this case the right people needed to be involved for liability reasons. Second, it could mean that other members needed to be included to do the best possible job they could on the grant. Because we do not know what subgroup was pursued, we do not know how they decided who needed to be in on decision-making. By looking for



additional representation from a fellow community member, Estelle could be espousing more inclusion in decision-making. She could be saying that in order to make a decision about a major project, the right players should be involved to find a win-win solution for everyone. The other thing it could mean is representation in a more strict, liberal democratic way; everyone has a say in an issue. These two values mean very different things. If her statement was motivated by the liberal democratic cluster of values of communication, we would expect to see more about social and political equity, freedom of speech, equal say, and voting. Instead the context around her statement was more about community decision-making, not consensus, because she did not advocate reaching out to everyone, only to a specific group. As people struggled with articulating what they meant by calling a community to action, with respect to decision-making, grant work, etc. some espoused the preference for less talk and more doing something.

*Less Meetings, More Action.*

A couple of the members expressed their frustration with monthly meetings. They wanted less talk and more action. These members espoused preferences that belong to the task cluster. I asked what advice members had for community collaborators. Wendy said,

I guess I would say to have fewer monthly meetings and uh, more subcommittee meetings where you are doing specific goal oriented tasks not expecting the people to come to a monthly meeting and that, I mean that's a meeting every two weeks so you come to a monthly meeting and then you come to another meeting to work on a specific project. I think sometimes [Karen] forgets that we all have full time jobs (interview with Wendy).

Similarly Liz said, "I guess I thought that most of the things that got done on the council got done in informal groups anyway so why go to the big formal meetings?" (interview with Liz). Meeting talk was considered a waste of time. This is a very different sentiment than those given by the people who wanted information only and who were quite satisfied with the partnership meetings. These people were not satisfied. They rated the success of the group as a "3" out of "5". They wanted input into decision-making, the opportunity to make a difference, a "real" community collaboration that accomplished something. They had little time and tolerance for meetings. Their reasoning may be better understood after chapter seven's analysis of meetings.

*Let's Call it Consensus Decision-Making*

Still a task oriented approach to communication, but consensus is a loaded term with many issues associated with it. It assumes that everyone will work toward a decision that allows a win-win situation for all involved. Like so many terms such as collaboration, people tend to "throw" the word consensus around without following its ideal of full agreement. Having a preference of communication that prefers consensus decision-making is a move toward thinking of communication in a strong democracy way.

Betty, a founding member of the partnership and the person who coordinated the partnership before the state awarded a full-time position, espoused a value of consensual decision-making.

I think they're afraid that they'll lose that collaboration that happens in the parking lot and when you get up to get a drink of water (laughs) whatever um they're afraid to have it too formal. I don't want Robert's Rules of

Order, but I want something in between and I think it's more consensus building (interview with Betty).

It seems that Betty wants to build more agreement among members of the group. She thinks good communication would accomplish the task of consensus or agreement. The possibility exists that consensus is a popular term that Betty is "throwing around." Some people would argue that conflict is key to consensus. She may not be aware of the challenges that true consensus requires overcoming. However, because Betty ran the partnership in its early days, she is probably able to reflect better than most on where it needs to be changed. She advocates bringing people together to build trust and work toward making collective decisions, yet the limits of Betty's accessible vocabulary about how to express that idea make it a struggle for this group.

All of the preferences of communication within this task cluster show how the members of this partnership struggle to accomplish something, bring people together and make the most out of the opportunity membership in this partnership offers. They espouse preferences for less talk and more action, more involvement in decision making, and voting. All of the preferences in this cluster call for more involvement, inclusion and participation into completing tasks pointing toward the Unitarian interrelated principles.

Just as those with preferences of communication toward information had done, those who struggled with the shortcomings of the partnership because tasks were not being accomplished through communication, looked to structure to solve their problems.

*The Turn to Structure*

The assumption was that the perceived time wasted in meetings could change more quickly by modifying the partnership's structure. If the structure changed to be committee based, people would join the committees in which they were interested, work on projects, apply for grants, and make decisions to better the partnership. This would give the task-oriented people satisfaction. As with the information cluster, the turn to structure as the answer to the partnership's problems seemed to be a collective answer, but for different reasons. The new structure would eliminate the monthly meetings in exchange for committee meetings. Then the committees would make decisions in smaller groups. The committees would come back to the larger group and update them on their progress. The larger community could then make decisions together and solve problems related to early childhood education. However, the newly designed structure was problematic because there was still no way for the people who espoused Unitarian preferences to articulate exactly what they wanted. They were not equipped to do so. While structure was a change they hoped might facilitate easier communication with their preference for accomplishing tasks, there was still no mechanism for the entire partnership to be involved in problem solving as a community. Breaking up into committees actually served to separate people rather than bring them together.

The task cluster most closely ties back to the unitary interrelated principles. While people wanted to "get to work," their preferences always had an underlying preference of doing projects together, focusing on their similarities

and encouraging unity. Members espoused a preference for being together and just getting down to the business of improving early childhood education in their community.

While the task-oriented members told me during interviews they were dissatisfied with the current decision-making process, some were also dissatisfied with another aspect of the partnership. Some members, who wanted to be more involved with the partnership in another way, sought a relationship when they joined the group. Some of these people were not concerned with tasks, while others were both task-oriented and valued building relationships. The third cluster "relationship" is explored in the next section.

### RELATIONSHIPS

The general feeling from some members who regularly attended meetings was that information from the partnership was useful, but the bond created by communication between members was lacking. These members made a distinction between communication as a transmission model and communication as an interaction and relationship between people. These members longed for a sense of belonging and being a part of something that was bigger. It was important for them to build relationships, foster friendships and strengthen bonds. In this cluster we see an espousal of themes relating to community, and the struggle to organize in a way that fosters that Unitarian preference. Betty, one of the founders of the group, said,

I don't have a phone call list and don't you think that's like absolutely essential if collaboration is our motto and quality then the way to improve quality is to get a program, to find out what they are doing or what they

know to establish that connection, and uh, that's been elusive to this group (interview with Betty).

The more involved members desired not only lateral communication, but also a sense of connection and relationship building.

Penny, an executive board member, brought this up when she was frustrated at the annual meeting that the general members did not know that they were a part of a larger group because nothing from the state meetings was ever briefed back to them. The state program that wrote the legislation to bring the East County partnership into being, also created 17 other county-based programs. She did not think most members were aware of that. Her frustration with the lack of communication between board members and the rest of the partnership manifested in her thoughts that if communication improved, people would feel part of a larger group. This desire for being a part of something and for feeling included was important to Penny. It was also prevalent in many of my interviews with more involved partnership members.

Once the interviewees were more comfortable with me, our conversation shifted focus from their thoughts about the group to their personal feelings about the partnership. This may have been from my questions about how much influence they felt they had within the partnership, the differences they saw between their stakeholder organization and the partnership and whether or not they felt like a part of the group. All of the more involved members, not the minimally involved, and the executive board members espoused an ideal of feeling included in the partnership, having a sense of being valued as a person and

a contributing member, and learning from other people's ideas. People's ideas, however, ranged quite widely as to how they defined building relationships. For example, the coordinator, Karen, took "feeling welcome" very seriously, yet some members did not feel that ideal was being achieved.

*Building Relationships as Feeling Welcome*

The coordinator thought it was her most important job to make people feel welcome. Her open door policy within the partnership was her top priority. She did what she thought was appropriate to make people feel like they belonged. She put food around the table. She never restricted who attended meetings, even if several people from the same organization attended. She talked about how important it was to include people in the partnership often and publicly. While her role was to coordinate, she assumed the leadership role on the council because she was the one who the state worked with. She was the only one whose full-time job was the partnership. She was required to make decisions and in doing so took on a leadership role. She said,

The hard part was truly the collaboration, calling people and trying to get them to come and not being sure what they were coming to, you know and finding the key in that whole relationship of respecting who they were and kinda ask some questions about how comfortable they were about coming and then as you probably have seen in our meetings, making sure that when people come that they feel really welcome and that they leave with a sense that they might belong in that group. That they have something to contribute, that we really appreciate that they came, that they spent their time. (interview with Karen).

Karen also talked about making sure there was enough room at the meeting tables for people.

So um you have to make space for everybody and I don't like to make anybody feel like they're sitting on the fringe, looking at the back of somebody else's head and not actually sitting at the table. I mean even

when people come in late, I always feel like they should still have a place at the table where they can sit and feel welcome and all that so we are working on that and getting more table space.”

She compared the partnership meetings to a session at the State House of Representatives she observed. She said, “To me, it’s just disrespectful. If somebody is there and one of your peers and they have a point, I don’t care if you don’t agree with it, you should at least hear what they have to say, it’s disrespectful” (interview with Karen).

Karen’s top priority was that people felt welcome at the partnership meetings. For her, inclusion was an emotional issue. Her espoused and embedded preferences of communication lie within this particular way of perceiving what it means to build relationships. She defined collaboration as, “To me to collaborate means that you, it’s kind of like a preschool word, it means that you are willing to share your resources not knowing necessarily what you’ll get.” (interview 1) Others interpreted building relationships in different ways.

#### *Building Relationships Through not Offending*

Jane, the contracted facilitator, had a similar outlook as Karen about how people should feel within the partnership, yet she felt that was accomplished in a different way. When talking about her role as facilitator, she said, “I was trying to be very politically correct.” This meant she was trying to include all the members and not offend any. When reflecting on the partnership, she said,

It appears to me, in the two meetings in my capacity, that people are being heard, that people’s opinions are valued, and that the different entities on this cou, on this collaboration are really trying to be respectful of each other and work together because they have different, very different views



um and yet their desired end result is pretty much the same (interview with Jane).

She saw in her two meetings one year apart with the council what she valued most about communication. She thought that members were inclusive and polite. This way of valuing politeness and being unoffensive in communication resembles the Quakers who served as an example of the unitary interrelated principles. Others interpret building relationships in other ways.

*Inclusion as Sharing/Hearing Each Other's Voice/Paying Attention to People*

When I asked Diana about how communication should work she said, Um, because there's also with communication and collaboration, there's a risk that you take, it's a risk to say wait a minute, think about this. If you don't have a relationship with those other people, you're not going to work and therefore you don't get their good information, their good insights, their good background. And I definitely think that's what's happening in our council. We're just kind of going along with the speed, on this little boat and there really isn't an anchor and there really isn't a captain (interview with Diana).

Diana espoused preferences of building relationships, not simply transmission of information. She thought she had a lot to offer and if the partnership tried harder to include people, it would be better for it.

While one analysis of Diana's talk could point toward the humanistic psychological interrelated principles because she discussed relationships and valuing others, a deeper analysis including the context points toward the Unitarian principles. If Diana's talk was more humanistic, she would be worried about people closing up, or not being authentic. She would make certain she accurately captured how those other people felt. Instead, she focused on the fact that people should feel welcome and included in partnership meetings.

Patsy espoused a similar ideal of communication, which was to include many voices in the partnership discussions. "It would be nice to hear from other people on the committee, just to know what their opinion is of all of it, or what they are bringing to the table that you don't know about. There are probably a lot of people on that council that do a lot more than people know."

I went on to ask her "Do you think it should be up to those people who talk a lot to kind of bring other people into the conversation?" She said,

In a sense and that's a yes and no for me. Yes, I think they need to initiate something but by doing that just opening up to the group and in the sense, so what do the people that don't say much, do you have anything to say? Or maybe even having, this is why I don't like to talk but that's another issue, I mean you have the same people who like to talk because they like to (laughs). Even having it so they can write down their ideas. Maybe having a suggestion box or an idea type box that you pull ideas out of because your voice can be heard that way it doesn't have to be you know talking it can be written down on a piece of paper like here's my idea and it can be anonymous, but I just think that doing different things, yes, they probably do need to initiate but as adults you kind of need to take that you need to, it's competition really, you throw it out there, somebody's got to grab it, you can't grab it for them. You know so it's great to be able to yes, they probably need to initiate a table-wide almost a roundtable discussion but if people don't take advantage of it and I'm one of those people you know, I'm definitely improving in it but if I don't take advantage of it then, that's a big part, because someone has to talk. Someone has to pick up the conversation or pick up the idea. So if they don't do it, it's kind of a catch 22 (interview with Patsy).

Patsy has very explicit preferences of communication she would like to see in place during the partnership meetings. They include using various mediums to bring everyone into the conversation. Other members explain the importance of bringing everyone in, even those on the outside.

When I asked Holly about advice she would give to a new group, she said, I think pay attention to people who are on the fringes. Sometimes I think they really do have a lot to offer and if they don't feel that what they have

is being recognized, acknowledged and put to good use, they just fall off, then if you need them, you have to try to find, to rebuild those bridges, but they're not real clear about communicating to the rest of the collaborative partners (interview with Holly).

While my question asked for generic advice, the solution espoused preferences Holly wanted in place in the partnership. She pointed out, as Penny suspected, people who feel left out would not come back. They wanted to be a part of the community and feel included. Along the same lines of wanting to be integrated, other members had definitive preferences about the appropriate size for the partnership.

*A Perfect Size to Build Relationships*

Diana, who espoused preferences of communication from the task cluster, also seems to long for the old days when the partnership was smaller and more "sharing," occurred.

The council used to be pretty small you know when I first started coming and working, there were about 12 at a good meeting sometimes 6. And um then it was pretty easy to share information about what needed to be written or what we needed to work on and what was available to um apply for grants and work together um (long pause). I'm not sure how information is distributed other than you need to be at the council meetings to get information and even then I don't think it's communicated well (interview with Diana).

If we look at growth within the partnership from Diana's perspective, it is negative. What is missing from the more recent, larger meetings that made her feel this way?

One bit of context that may help explain Diana's value of "closer" communication is that she was a part of the group when it was only the Western

part of the county. Everyone knew each other well, worked together on many other committees and had overlapping interests. When the state demanded the partnership be expanded to include the large city in the county, the neighborhood, suburban, and a bit agrarian feel changed. The expansion went against her preference for a smaller, community based partnership. The closeness of the small setting enabled "sharing," while the larger meetings foster communication that is not done very well in her opinion. Yet preferences of communication that would preserve the "sharing" aspect of the meetings are never talked about. It is as if communication is too personal to talk about. It is a ubiquitous problem throughout the partnership, yet unworthy of specific attention. The relationship cluster ties back to the unitarian interrelated principles. Regardless of how members differed in their preferences of what was important within building relationships, they all struggled to articulate a vision of communication that would accomplish what they wanted. References to themes like sharing, preschool, respect, making people feel comfortable and wanted, reflected their community as workers in early childhood education.

After describing all three clusters of preferences, I want to provide an example of talk during an interview that exemplifies all three clusters together.

#### DIFFERENTIATING THREE LOGICS

Some times people work with different preferences of communication when they talk. In this example, a member espoused a preference for all three clusters.

I think that one of the experiences of the council has been informal communication, informal liaisons and informal kind of, people are very

action oriented, they want to get stuff done, they want to see stuff happen and they just kind of take off with things and I think that um that's a piece of the council that I wouldn't want to, that I would want to protect to some extent but it also is a less formal kind of a group and less formal kind of you know we're going to have to move away from that, it's going to have to become more formalized whether it's through a newsletter and I think [Karen] does send out minutes and notes but ah there maybe needs to be, because then what happens is that the people who are involved know what's going on but then people who are on different levels of that involvement don't know what's going on and if you really want everybody to be ah if you want people to start to invest more in it than they have to feel that they are a part of it and they have to get the same communication that everybody gets so there needs to be a couple more formal ways to communicate than what we have right now (interview with Liz).

In this example, we see Liz first espoused preferences that belong to the task cluster of communication. She said that people are task oriented and want to get things done. Next, she moved to the importance of people feeling "a part of it," which belongs to the relationship cluster. Finally, we see Liz's appeal that everyone receive the same information, which belongs to the information cluster.

In this example we see the framework of drawing upon different kinds of preferences. Accomplishing tasks is important. Building relationships is important. Receiving information is important. Preferences of communication are situational. What happens when decision-making, inclusion, and information compete in practice? While there is a lot of power that comes from drawing on three clusters of preferences, there are also consequences. These clusters point back to larger interrelated principles for judging communication. The consequences of enacting different major belief systems of communication will be explored in chapter eight.

## FRUSTRATION IN THE PARTNERSHIP

Some of the general members did not feel an equal part of the partnership because the executive board did not value their opinion. These frustrations came up when I asked why people did not bring up their feelings about communication in the meetings. Diana, Kathryn, and Sarah backed up Penny's supposition when talking about the partnership. Situated ideals can be extracted from her talk.

I think that people look to that core group, especially [Karen], now that she's the coordinator to you know, it's kind of like well I'll bring it up, but I'm not sure anybody feels real invested, I can make a difference, my opinion counts. I think a lot of people feel like they're spurious so why, why fight for something why? {laughs}. I'm on the outside. I think a lot of people, the majority feel like they're on the outside (interview with Diana).

She wanted to belong and will only be invested when she feels that way. To her, it is not only important to belong, but also to have her opinion included in decision-making and to make a difference in her community. Similarly Kathryn, a private childcare business owner, did not feel a part of the council. She said, "I felt very out of place, not welcome and awkward when I went to an [East] county meeting. [Penny] was welcoming while others were very suspicious" (interview with Kathryn). Sarah felt that as a private childcare business owner, her voice was lost. "We're not fully included because the rest of the council thinks that we are a private business that is entrepreneurial...we need true reach to include us. They don't ask what the private sector thinks about things in the system" (interview with Sarah). Here again we see a cry for being a part of the community. She and Sarah felt like they did not matter.

While Kathryn and Sarah felt this way, in an informal conversation I had with Estelle, she was really excited and flattered that Kathryn and Sarah had taken so much time out of their important and busy schedules to attend partnership meetings. This excitement was not communicated back to them. Kathryn and Sarah felt unwelcome, perhaps largely because most of the decision making and determining of the partnership's direction occurred within the executive council. Kathryn needed to feel that her time made a difference and that her sacrifice to attend the meetings impacted them. They needed to feel like they were a part of the community.

I never saw Kathryn at a meeting after my interview with her. I did see Sarah, however, and it made me think about why she kept coming to meetings as frustrated as she was. She had told me at one point she always hoped the next meeting would be the one that would change things.

### *The Turn to Structure*

The council pursued the notion that any problems with information, representation, decision-making, ownership, inclusion, and equality of work can be corrected by changing the structure. Yet they all pictured something different when they thought about structure. Depending on the logic they used, the structure would come out differently. Some would design a structure that facilitated better information flow. Others would foster a community feel and increased decision-making at the local level. Others would develop relationships that would build community. In their minds, communication was rarely to blame for partnership problems. Interestingly, the members needed agreement on the

idea that a change in structure could fix their problems. They were looking to the annual meeting and an outside, paid facilitator to help them devise a structure that would take care of their issues. They wanted everyone to be on board with the new structure. They seemed to be searching for a Unitarian approach to fixing the partnership's problems by paying attention to the structure. They had many other Unitarian ideas such as making people feel welcome, encouraging them to come back to meetings, and developing a common value system to improve early childhood education in their community. It was important that everyone buy into the new structure and that it be presented by someone other than Karen, the coordinator, or the executive board. The contracted facilitator was on the outside of the partnership and was therefore more trusted as a reputable source and not someone who had a vested interest in the partnership going one way rather than another.

Regardless of the cluster of preferences of communication, structure was consistently the hope people clung to thinking it might make their frustrations in the partnership go away. Structure was easier to talk about than communication because they had the vocabulary to do so. Throughout their work experiences, they had been exposed to the idea of structure; many of them had experience in the school districts or governmental offices. Because of this, they had an arsenal of words around the idea of structure at their disposal, while ideas about communication did not come as easily.



*Similarity Trumps Difference*

These women came together because they passionately believed in their work and wanted the support of others like themselves. The council did not have community leaders, business people, or elected officials. The council was comprised of women who worked in early childhood education, either in day care centers, the school districts, mental or health services for children, or government offices focused on child welfare. Early childhood education is largely an underappreciated, underfunded cause. People, largely women, who traditionally work in the field, are not paid well or considered to be in a "real" profession. Regardless of their position, the women involved in this partnership have the biggest hearts. Most are fiercely devoted to improving the quality of early childhood education in their community. Others desperately want to feel a part of something big, important and valued. Some want both. The executive board approached this challenge by concentrating efforts on making people feel welcome. Differences were treated as superficial. These women share personal experiences and feelings that arose out of encounters they can all appreciate. They feel their experiential foundation of understanding the business of early childhood education trumps any differences they have. They do whatever it takes to get people who can share this background back in the door. They look for similarity, not difference, which makes it difficult to invent creative solutions. Also, by valuing inclusion above all else they are frustrating and alienating the people who are already committed. Many tensions arose from member's preferences of communication.

*The Tension Between Representation and Getting Some Work Done*

The espoused preference of representation could never occur with the way they ran the partnership. The espoused preference of welcoming challenged the value of having a steady group that came every month to work. Betty espoused a preference for an open door policy. She credits that openness to the partnership's success. She said,

Quality has been even from the beginning days, to improve collaboration to improve the quality of care in [East] county, to have better, better representation, we were always looking for more people to invite so that you get more opinions and you get more resources and so I think that the original group, had they not been so open and I know I'm part of the original group so it sounds really kind of like bragging, but had that original group not been so open, it wouldn't have worked, it wouldn't have (interview with Betty).

Yet embedded in their actions, the partnership is a long way from having the entire county represented.

East County is quite large and the majority of representation on the council is from a small part of the county. The part outside of the city is largely ignored. True county representation, therefore, is not a reality for this partnership. Karen, the coordinator, said,

That's AC, but do I know what the issues are of the rural people? Only because I hear from other pilots, I hear from other rural pilots what their issues are but I don't know what the specifics are for the rural issues of AC because I need to reach out a little bit more strongly probably and find out and make them feel a little bit more welcome (interview with Karen).

Here we see that it is less about representation and more about feeling welcome. Karen assumes if people feel welcome they will share their resources. Largely,

the resources currently being shared are with members of the executive board only.

All of these members who espouse the need for representation were heavily involved in the partnership. Estelle and Karen were on the executive board and Betty ran the partnership before the state funded a full-time position. Their chief concern was to keep the doors open to anyone interested in the partnership, to include specific people with some knowledge or experience in a certain area, and to make people from the outlying parts of the county feel welcome. The general members, however, struggled with the difficulties the open door policy created.

Another example of frustration with meetings included constantly changing members, rotating representation, and having to start over every time. This is a direct opposite of including as many voices as possible.

Pam, a member whose stakeholder organization provided services, had a different feeling about representation.

Um, I, I think when I first started the communication was weak except for the meetings and one of the things that happened in the first six or eight months was and that was because they were trying to grow, you'd get people at the council and then the next month, some of those people wouldn't be there and other new people would be there and it seemed like for at least 6-8 months, we rehashed like every time or we had to repeat or people came in with different ideas and different direction and you know, that wasn't where the group was going, so I think that was just a natural struggle in trying to grow the group (interview with Pam).

She understood the challenges of growing a group, yet she was concerned every time a new person came in, the partnership started over in a sense.

Members were aware of the different views of communication. For example, Estelle pointed out how preferences are situational in her explanation of one of the challenges the partnership faces. She explained how it is important to be inclusive, yet consistent representation allows the partnership to move forward.

Every single council meeting that was ever attended over the years had first time people at it. And so when that kind of thing happens and we've got that kind of open door in and out kind of process and then to try to actually communicate business information, I think it's problematic and it's just one of these things where people are back and forth trying to figure out who is there and be welcoming but also trying to figure out how do we get the work done? (interview with Estelle).

Estelle pointed out the consequences for placing such a high importance on inclusion. She framed it as a struggle to figure out how to do the work. Should the task have priority or the relationship?

This tension we see occurring was between the competing preferences of inclusion to anyone who wants it and consistent representatives. An open door policy hindered a knowledgeable set of members who attended meetings regularly, kept up on the partnership's business and did not require copious explanations for every issue that came up. Calling up these two ideals showed us how larger preferences remain hidden within statements. For example, the statement of inclusion reflected Unitarian principles while representation pointed to liberal democracy. In this partnership, members were drawing on both of these. While this afforded them the power that each set of interrelated principles offers, it may have caused them trouble. While chapter eight specifically addressed dilemmas that arise from conflicting values, some foreshadowing may be helpful at this point. By placing the preference of inclusion above all others

such as making people feel welcome at meetings and keep them coming back, the consequence may be that those who were trying to accomplish work become frustrated and leave because no work is being accomplished. Conversely, if inclusion was cast aside for representation, the risk is that people may feel left out, unwelcome, and decisions may be made that do not necessarily reflect them. If both of these preferences were at work at the same time, people may feel both discluded and frustrated.

For example, Diana said,

Other pilots have their select groups and they don't add any more people. This is our group. And um, so I think it's easier to establish relationships, get continuity going but when you're having people come in, and having people flow out and it's open to anybody and everybody and like [Karen] said, we want more people to join. So, what is this? How many people can you have to collaborate? 150?(laughs). (interview with Diana).

One preference embedded in this statement is a small number makes for a better collaboration. This position assumes people are more likely to open up, share, listen and collaborate with a small group. This group perceives it has lost something by getting larger. The members are very uncomfortable in a situation unfamiliar to them. What is occurring is that frustrated people are reproducing frustrating situations through normative concepts of communication. In the small group, they were ok. They could talk freely and openly, felt they had a rapport with each other, had built strong relationships, and were relaxed. Trust was already established. In a big group, however, it is virtually unheard of that people would say what they really feel, not be afraid of asking dumb questions, and open

themselves up to the vulnerabilities that they accept in a smaller setting. In larger groups, people assume others are working their own agendas.

With so many different preferences of communication in play, I turn now to a summary of the clusters of preferences found in my interviews.

### SUMMARY

What I found during my interviews with members of the East Council was an even closer look at a wonderful group of women who were completely committed to improving the quality of early childhood education in their community. They employed three very different logics of how to do this. By analyzing their talk, I was able to constantly compare their preferences of communication, which divided into three clusters. The first cluster, the information cluster, comes from the rational/argumentative/informational interrelated principles. Above all, the transmission model of communication is valued. People are highly satisfied with the communication within the group if they are receiving, giving, or clearing information. The second cluster, the decision-making cluster, belongs to a group of members who judge communication based on increased involvement, task accomplishment and decision-making. Their logic points back to the Unitarian interrelated principles. Their ideas are not neatly nor clearly laid out, but everything they talk about has to do with action, being involved in developing community, decision-making, and voting. They are unable to articulate their vision of communication and really what they want out of the partnership, but they are real people, struggling to understand, get to work, and make things happen. They just want to get to the

task, to start doing it, despite the fact they do not fully have their arms around what the task is. Finally, the relationship cluster is made of people who want to build relationships between each other, foster bonds, and make everyone feel welcome and a part of the quest. The Unitarian interrelated principles also drives their logic. They desperately want to build a community everyone can feel a part of and be committed to. They are women who play various roles within the early childhood field and have come together because of their similar experiences. They want to give and receive each other's support and strengthen their bonds together.

In response to my first research question, "How when and by whom are espoused values expressed in a collaborative process?" there seems to be a relationship between people's preferences of communication and their level of involvement. The executive board members felt differently from the general members who felt differently than the people who occasionally attended meetings. The occasional attendees associated good communication with information. The more involved people wanted to either accomplish something or build a relationship. The executive board that determined the vector for the organization differed among themselves on their thoughts about preferences of communication. They talked about personalities and structure, not communication.

They considered the idea of communication spontaneous. It was not a core issue to their challenges. They did not necessarily associate collaboration with communication. They did not talk about the process ideals of

communication unless asked about it. When asked about it they suggested preferences of communication they wanted, but did not have. These include everyone getting the same information, including all partnership members in the talk around decisions, making decisions, being involved in the business of the council, feeling included, the preservation of an informal "feel" to the partnership, developing relationships between members, and others. Yet each cluster of preferences offers a different idea about which of those preferences are desirable and which are not.

People mix and match choices of communication in their every day talk. This does not appear to be intentional; it is not strategically done, but more of a fall back to what they know, their normative ways of communication. Some people do not want to commit themselves too much to a volunteer group for many reasons, which most of us can understand. They attend meetings to get information and then try to slip out before anyone asks them to do anything extra. Some people find talk a waste of time. Meetings can be torture for this group. They want to get down to the business of making decisions. Most of the members of this partnership want people to feel included. These early childhood education professionals are nurturing, loving kinds of people who want others to feel good.

A relationship did seem to exist between the preference of communication people had and their level of involvement. If people were minimally involved in the partnership, they thought communication was good if information was transferred. However, those who were more actively involved, i.e. attended



meetings regularly, associated good communication with either decision-making or building relationships. I learned how frustrated sentiments about wanting to be more involved both with the decision-making process and with building relationships within the group.

Despite the many variations in the member's preferences of communication, they all agreed on changing the structure to help solve problems. When all of these different values of communication come together in a group that must communicate, tensions are bound to exist. How can we be proactive about managing these tensions? What consequences do they have? Would it be helpful to point this out to people in the public/private partnership or collaboration business? Let's review some things we know: First, a collaboration or public/private partnership assumes that some people are voluntarily participating in the group. It also assumes their commitment to organizing in a certain way. Next, communication is vital to the group's sustenance. Next, each person prefers communication in some certain way that points back to one of the overarching belief systems about communication. These are captured by the interrelated principles of the heuristic. If they talk about this it may be helpful, but only to bring out their differences. If they do not talk about it, people are bound to be dissatisfied. Take the example above. The people who were concerned about completing a task may have a portion of the ideal of collaboration figured out—shared goal, but the people who were concerned about the relationship have another part of it figured out, the trust, flat hierarchy part. Which is more important? Do you need both? If rational/argumentative/informational people

who are happy to receive information only mix with humanistic psychological people who want a real relationship, how will that work? If different levels of membership to a group like this one were available, the people who just wanted to come and listen to the information and take it back to their stakeholder organizations would be allowed to do so. Then, the people who wanted to accomplish tasks and those who wanted to build relationships would talk about what they wanted. Some of them would want both and people could self-appoint to different jobs depending on what they wanted to do, the time they had to offer, etc. Through this, they could adopt a strong democracy preference of communication where diversity is valued for the benefit of the group, where different preferences of communication actually strengthens the process rather than weakens it. These ideas will be further developed in chapter eight which points out some of the consequences of different preferences of communication, as well as conclusions discovered in this study.

The partnership members espoused preferences of communication during our interviews that clustered around information, task completion and building relationships. In chapter seven espoused and embedded preferences are drawn out of meetings and comparisons will be made between the preferences extracted from interviews and meetings. Finally, consequences exist for following each of those preferences, which will be further explored in chapter eight.

## CHAPTER 7: ESPOUSED AND EMBEDDED PREFERENCES OF COMMUNICATION IN MEETINGS

Because my site did not have a central physical location, the partnership members attended monthly meetings in order to get together. These meetings along with the biannual state level meetings and training sessions were an excellent place to observe the partnership in action. In this chapter, much like the previous one, I am interested in how people make choices of communication and how that begins to indicate their espoused preferences during meetings.

As with the interviews, I analyzed not only what the person said during the meeting, but also the context around his or her statement including who said it, where, when, and how. Meetings, just like interviews, have their own set of “rules” of normative communication. “Turn taking, turn allocation, turn transition, speaker selection, indeed the whole gamut of the Sacks et al. turn-taking model, take specific shape and direction in meeting settings” (Boden, 1994, p. 82). What I intended to do in this chapter was to look at the dynamics of the interaction between partnership members. Meetings are communicative events and specific types of focused interaction (Schwartzman, 1989). My methods of participant observation, recording the meetings, taking copious field notes followed by constant comparative method suggested that I would be looking at interaction between meeting attendees. What I discovered, however, was very little interaction in the monthly meetings I attended. In my experience in meetings, people discuss issues, they are expected to listen to what others say, not interrupt them, be on time when the meeting starts, be prepared if they are

scheduled to speak, pay attention, give their opinion, reflect on their own experience if it is relevant, and not be disruptive. What I found, however, is that meetings have all different kinds of expectations. In the meetings I attended for the partnership very few people other than the coordinator spoke. Discussion was virtually non-existent. Therefore, meeting norms are emergent. For example, while Boden said, "Interruptions come as invasions of meeting space –whether late arrivals or telephone calls- and are discouraged" (1984, p. 87.), I observed cell phones constantly ringing in meetings I attended (18 Dec 03, 8 cell phones rang during the 2 hour meeting). In fact, cell phones rang in every meeting I attended. The reality of meetings in my site was quite different than many I had experienced in other situations. I hope to enrich the notion of meeting norms by showing how silence, rather than interaction, became a strong indicator of preferences of communication. Boden (1984) argued that the "action" part of a meeting is talk. That would make silence inaction. I argue that is not the case. Silence denotes another enacted preference of communication.

This chapter analyses meetings with the explicit purpose of tackling the first four questions core to this dissertation. The first question is, "How do people see collaboration? How do they link collaboration and communication?" I will explain how people talked about collaboration in meetings and how they related collaboration with communication. The second question is, "How, when, and by whom are espoused preferences of communication expressed in a collaborative process?" I will describe who espoused a certain choice about communication, when in the meeting, and how the espousal came about such as what that person

said and the context around the comment. The third question is, "How are embedded preferences put into play? How do they compete in actual talk?" I will explain how embedded preferences are part of people's talk, and what the relationship is between the choices people espouse and those embedded within their talk. The fourth question is, "How are both kinds of preferences reproduced through communication practices?" I will explain how people define espoused choices and whether or not tensions or different conceptions arise between definitions or between espoused and embedded preferences.

Clusters of preferences of communication that emerged from meetings were basically the same as those that emerged in my interviews. First, embedded preferences illustrated how valuable the information was that was being given to members. This was information they took back to their stakeholder organizations. Second, involvement in task completion was important to some in this group. These members wanted to be involved in doing work for their community. Finally, and with the most emphasis, building relationships and making sure people felt a part of the group and its efforts, was important to the members of the partnership. This came out quite strongly during the monthly partnership meetings. Inclusion was both espoused explicitly and also embedded in talk such as the attempt to preserve informality. Using these values of communication instead of others had consequences for this group, which will be explored in chapter eight.

In this chapter, I am going to describe several different meetings. I will give a description of each setting and attendees. The main focus of my data

gathering and analysis, however, was on the partnership monthly meetings. The state level meetings fill out the context and provide some information about what the state level coordinators were learning and doing in their meetings. This chapter starts by describing one state level meeting where process rules including rules about communication came up. The chapter proceeds by describing each cluster of preferences of communication with examples provided from various meetings. The chapter concludes with some examples of how espoused and embedded preferences competed during meetings.

### PROCESS RULES

The first meeting I attended in November of 2002 for this research project was a state level meeting where all of the county-level coordinators were present. This was a two-day meeting in which I was invited for the first day from 8:30 a.m. through 5:30 p.m. The people running the meeting were the state-level managers of the early childhood pilot program. They worked directly for the state as the overall coordinators of the collaborative project. The other attendees were the eighteen county coordinators with a few different presenters who came in to brief on how to frame messages, consensus decision-making, and successful grassroot programs within the state. I and one other researcher attended the meeting. The meeting was held in the capitol city of the state in a conference facility inside a historical, downtown hotel on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor. The room was one of many conference rooms with a coat rack straight ahead as you walked in, a row of cabinets with counters on which they put trays of food, and several rectangular tables pushed together into a square shape. There was a computer with projector

near the front of the room. The room had one window that looked directly at another tall, downtown, brick building. While I did not know I would be invited to work with East County, Karen, the coordinator, was present that day with all of the other county level coordinators and I met her. For Karen, the state capitol city was only a short drive away. Others had to fly in from outlying counties of the state. Some were dressed in suits, while others wore jeans and sweaters.

They started the meeting by conducting a "rule review" of how the meeting would run and wrote down norms and rules. These norms and rules were suggested by the people in attendance. They follow: order, structure, turn-taking, a collective mission and vision, consensus when reasonable, majority decision when consensus is not possible, face-to-face contact, openness, honesty, trust, and open communication including bringing up difficult questions (field notes, Nov 02). They defined these tenets as key to the process of collaborating. This act of talking and writing down the rules espoused an ideal of communication that everyone would follow in the meeting. They talked through things like whether or not their current meeting place was convenient for people, how the chairpeople for the state level organization should rotate among the counties, what they expected to get accomplished at the meeting, etc. At this meeting, Karen, the East county coordinator, was serving as one of the rotating co-chairs of the state level meeting. From what I could see, the people in attendance used communication that embedded preferences basically in line with their espoused preferences.

The reason for describing this first meeting which was not a monthly meeting of the East County partnership members but a county coordinator's

meeting is to explain that this was the first meeting I attended. It led me to expect that some process rules would be covered at the beginning of all meetings. Karen was a co-chair of the state level meeting and she ran the monthly East County partnership meetings. What I learned, however, was that practice of setting up process rules happened only at that first state meeting. Process rules were not covered at the beginning of the monthly meetings of the East County partnership. Even if explicit attention to process rules was not a standard part of the monthly meetings, espoused ideals of communication embedded in people's talk, were a part of the meetings. I learned that Karen actively took part in a meeting, probably several, that began by defining process rules, yet she did not bring these process rules back to the East County meetings. Nor did she bring any of the tools she learned in the presentations about framing messages, consensus decision making and collaboration. She purposefully chose not to run East County's meeting that way. In the monthly meetings, Karen did all of the talking. As a result, partnership members espoused their preference of information through their silence during meetings.

#### INFORMATION

What I found surprising was how little members of the partnership really spoke, especially at the first meetings I attended. The executive board did some of the talking, while the coordinator, Karen, did not only the majority of the talking in meetings, but also the majority of espousing ideals of communication for the partnership during meetings. This observation led me to the discovery that



information was important to the members. I will start by describing the monthly partnership meetings.

### *Partnership Meetings*

The first partnership meeting I attended was in a county government building in the major city within the county. The building housed many offices and was almost brand new. The meeting was held in the Department of Human Services conference room and the reason the partnership chose that location, according to the coordinator, Karen, was so county elected officials could see the partnership meeting there, possibly stop by the meetings and introduce themselves. In my experience, elected officials do not often stop by meetings unless it is an important part of their daily schedule, but this was what the coordinator told us at the beginning of the meeting. That was the last time we ever met there, so I will move on to describe the meeting place where I attended the other monthly partnership meetings.

The partnership met most often at a library in their conference room. While the location was fairly central for the members of the county who regularly attended the meetings, the library was not located within the county lines. Because East County was so big, and included such a large portion of rural inhabitants, the partnership really only represented the metropolitan and suburban part of the county. Karen would set the room up in a square shape with tables and chairs and then set some of the food off to the side while prepositioning some of it in baskets and on trays around the tables. As mentioned before, Karen put a great deal of effort into the food she provided. There were baskets of candy, cut-up

fruits and vegetables, crackers and cheese, breads, etc. It was the kind of effort you would only put in if you wanted someone to feel very special. Taking down a temporary wall and making the space larger could also expand this room, but that was only done for the annual facilitated meeting. The smallness of the space used for monthly meetings seemed an intentional design. Unfortunately, the tables only sat 18 people. If more attended, they were forced to pull chairs up behind the square tables, which meant they were sitting behind someone and did not have a table on which to write.

The room had a door and no windows. Along one side of the room, cabinets with counter tops lined the edge. There was a small, white, dry erase board at one corner of the room. Perhaps because it was a library, the noise from outside the room was inaudible. The ventilation system, however, was very loud and often made it difficult to hear people during meetings. There were many unanswered complaints about the system and while some people suggested both other places to meet and a rotating meeting plan where members could see each other's stakeholder organizations, all the meetings were held in that room in the library.

Since I went to people's offices for my interviews, I was able to see where they worked and the space they did it in. The spaces ranged from private offices in government buildings, service organizations, schools and universities, to mental health evaluation rooms with toys and couches, to a Village Inn Restaurant booth. Some interviews were done in children's classrooms of child development centers on those little chairs made for kids. Therefore, the library where the

monthly meetings were held was a different space for all of the partnership members who came from various stakeholder organizations. Perhaps the people who worked in education were more comfortable than the child development workers who were used to ambient “kid” noise and brightly colored toys and decorations instead of the sterile and quiet library conference room. The other variable in the room that tended to make most people a bit self-conscious, at least in the beginning, was my video camera. While I did not use it in the first several meetings I attended, I used it in about 10 meetings. The first time I used it I would move it around the room to get close-ups of people’s faces when they spoke. I soon realized that was both unnecessary and obnoxious as the coordinator did the majority of the talking and I could more easily focus it in her general direction and capture the meeting on tape.

### *Sitting and Listening*

The members rarely espoused the importance of information during meetings. The majority of the meetings I attended during the first several months of my time in this site consisted predominately of the coordinator talking with members of the executive board chiming in now and then when they had something to offer. The members of the group, however, rarely said anything, but listened and took notes about events that were coming up, training sessions, scholarships, etc. They must have found value in coming and listening for two hours at a time with very little input. The fact that they sat there during meetings and came back month after month notes an embedded preference for receiving information as a preference of communication. Apparently, they were satisfied

with the transmission model of communication. Of note is they had no exposure that I could tell to any other models of communication. They were not trained on collaboration nor being part of a public/private partnership, but were expected to know what they were doing. If they were unsatisfied, no one brought that point up during a meeting. If they had experience with alternative forms of communication, no one spoke out about it. One possibility is that the silence from members became a normative way of communicating within meetings. If members did not talk, new members would not feel comfortable talking.

Some people did not attend meetings regularly. In order to find out why, I used interviews to follow up with some of the members. Their reason for no longer coming was that they had received the information they needed at the time. They did not seem dissatisfied with the communication within the partnership. All of the people had busy jobs in early childhood education. Seemingly, they would not voluntarily take time out of their schedules unless they were getting something in return. Karen was the conduit of information. Therefore, she did the majority of talking at the meetings. Outwardly, no one seemed to have a problem with that.

This role as information czar meant that Karen tended to take a leadership role in the partnership. She was the only person on the partnership who had a full time position that was solely devoted to it. All of the other members had stakeholder organizations. This was controversial for some executive board members who had more experience and training in community collaborations and business than Karen. Karen's background was in the school district. Yet she was

the one who received all of the information from the state about the partnership, available resources, grants, etc. She set the agenda and she moved item by item down the agenda during meetings telling the members what she thought they should hear.

As mentioned before, my greatest surprise was in my eighteen months with the partnership, new members constantly coming in and out of the meetings, how seldom process rules about communication came up. They were not listed in some type of organizational literature, posted on the wall, nor discussed in any of the monthly partnership meetings. New people coming through the door must have thought that was the norm; the coordinator disseminated information for the majority of the meeting. Each new person may have assumed that was simply the way communication was done within the partnership.

This information cluster of preferences ties back to the rational/argumentative/informational interrelated principles. The main logic supporting this cluster is that the most important part of communication is giving, receiving or clearing information. The members outwardly accepted this by not talking in the meetings and Karen actively practiced it in the early meetings by going step by step down her agenda and giving out information on various things that were going on with regard to early childhood education in the community. She talked about new books coming out, training opportunities, job openings, book fairs, symposiums, etc. For most, this was incredibly useful information they were not receiving from other avenues. For others, it was insufficient and did not constitute what they perceived as good communication.

A different cluster of preferences of communication emerged during meetings relating to people who thought good communication was about accomplishing things, working on projects, and making decisions. These members desperately wanted to make a difference in their community and they thought the best way to do that was to act.

### DECISION-MAKING

Despite my difficulty in naming this cluster in the previous chapter, I chose to use the same name as I observed the same grouping of preferences around working on projects, accomplishing tasks, and making decisions as I saw in the interviews. During the meetings I observed few tasks were done or decisions made much less a lively discussion between partnership members. For example, one member commented in the annual meeting that the partnership had not voted, or chosen a direction on an issue in over a year. For those who had a notion that good communication had to do with action, they were highly frustrated by this partnership's meetings. I start this cluster of preference off by describing a state level meeting where an issue was talked about in the interest of including people's input on decisions. This practice was not talked about nor carried over to the monthly partnership meetings.

#### *Using E-Mail to Make Decisions*

As mentioned earlier, the first meeting I attended in November of 2002 for this research project was a state level meeting where all of the coordinators were present. One of the key points they went over at the beginning of the meeting was that communication was key to the process, especially technology mediated

communication in the form of e-mail. If people frequently checked their e-mail, the state level coordinators could send out messages that needed quick input. More people could be reached quickly improving representation on certain issues. They talked a great deal about the importance of getting the message out to the representatives as efficiently as possibly and also getting their feedback quickly. This is an espoused form of representation. The state level coordinators wanted to include as many county coordinators on decisions as they could. E-mail facilitated the speed in which they could do this. If a last minute tasking or decision came up, they could quickly e-mail it out to all of the county coordinators as opposed to calling them or having to type a letter and send it. This preference was both espoused at the beginning of their meeting and embedded in their action of including as many people as possible in consensus decision-making. This state level meeting, however, was not at all like the monthly partnership meetings. Again, I contrast these two meetings to show that Karen was exposed to alternative meetings such as this one, which talked about including people in decision-making. She chose, however, not to carry that knowledge over to the partnership meetings.

While most of us may think of a monthly meeting as a place where issues are discussed, decisions made and problems addressed, this partnership's meetings were more of a clearinghouse for information. During a typical meeting, many issues were brought up, but they only voted once during a meeting that I attended over my 18-month study. That vote will be described later in this chapter. They usually talked about events, training sessions, or brought up issues

that needed attention, but never made any decisions. Each year they hosted a training session called the Quality Forum. It was a one-day training session where childcare givers could attend four different talks by guest speakers throughout the day and receive credit for their annual certification. That was an enormous organizational event that consumed a great deal of time and energy. Also, members of the partnership regularly applied for grants. These tasks were always being worked on, but as far as decisions of where the partnership should be headed, none were made.

At one meeting, they were going to make a decision on whether or not to charge a nominal fee when people joined the partnership, but they deferred the decision to a time when more people were present at the meeting. Today, that decision has yet to be made. It is difficult to separate out the people whose ideas about good communication included working on a task from those who really wanted to be included in decision-making from meeting data alone. Since people rarely complained or showed their frustration during meetings, it was hard to tell. The interviews, however, showed me how some people wanted a specific job to work on, while others wanted more involvement in making overall decisions. Some members wanted both. However, they had difficulty in interviews coming up with the vocabulary to express this idea. During meetings, they were virtually silent about it. I suppose the people who volunteered to help with the Quality Forum or to write a certain grant were espousing their preference of communication around doing, but I am unsure how I could separate their



preferences from the people who would choose being involved in decision making as a standard of good communication.

The predominate theme throughout the meetings, was the idea of making people feel welcome at the meetings, including them and building a warm environment that fostered relationships and community.

## RELATIONSHIPS

### *Making People Feel Welcome*

Despite their transmission approach to communication, inclusion was perhaps, the most in our interview and would try during meetings to produce that feeling for those who attended. Karen's talk indicated her value of inclusion as a preference of communication, yet also showed her constant struggle with her role in the partnership.

She made a point at the second meeting I attended to espouse that she valued other people's inputs. The partnership was throwing out ideas about how to spend some grant money. Karen spouted off several ideals and then stopped herself. She said, "I'm not going to tell you what I want...I want to hear what you think; maybe we can write it on the board." (meeting, Dec 02). She was undoubtedly conflicted, however, sharing some of the time she had with the other partnership members. Since the large group only met monthly and she had agenda items to cover, any time she allowed others to talk fostered her espoused preference of inclusion, yet challenged the choices embedded by her usual control of the meeting. To her inclusion seemed to mean being heard, not necessarily

being made a part of the decision-making process. In fact, she disassociated building a relationship with inclusion in task completion.

We see Karen's struggle with changing from the rational/argumentative/information interrelated principles where she has control of the meeting by virtue of having all of the information to her more Unitarian side where she wants to build a community, much like the legislation had called for, that would work to solve the problems associated with early childhood education issues.

### *Bonding Through Similarities*

Karen would start off meetings by having people introduce themselves and talk about where they were going to spend a holiday, what their favorite childhood toy was, etc. This was her ice-breaking step. During one meeting, the October 03, meeting, the members introduced themselves and then talked about their favorite children's book. Yet embedded in her exercise was the value of similarity. Not only were all the members children at one time who read books, but also in their profession of early childhood education, they were familiar with children's literature. It was something they enjoyed talking about and it required that everyone speak at that point during the meeting.

Karen continued to work hard to foster inclusion. During the January 2003 meeting, for example, after everyone introduced themselves, Karen was starting on the agenda items. People continued to come into the meeting late and pull up chairs behind the square of tables and chairs set up in the middle of the room. Karen paused and said, "If the people on the fringe want to kind of mesh in

here. It's so hard..." The latecomers cut her off, "We can hardly hear you because of the blowing." Comments about the ventilation system in the room were so common they were largely ignored. Karen replied, "Yeah, it would be so nice if we could kind of squish together." (transcript, Jan 03 meeting). She completely ignored people's pleas to take care of the noise from the air ducts. This example showed how inclusion for Karen is an emotional issue, not a communication problem, an issue linked to collaboration or being part of the group. She blatantly ignored people's complaints that they could not hear her voice over the ventilation system, but to her she was emotionally satisfied not if they felt included, but if they were sitting closer in proximity to her.

In another meeting (Oct 03), after introductions and a review of the minutes from the following month, Karen volunteered to take minutes because Penny, the secretary, was not there. Karen said, "I'll take minutes because I'm not talking very much." The format of this meeting was for committee chairs and project managers to report on what their respective groups were doing. It was a very differently formatted meeting than most.

It was at this meeting that we saw an outward result from the annual structure meeting. During that meeting, committees were re-established. During the meeting where Karen was quiet, we saw some foreshadowing about how the meetings would change in the future after the annual structure meeting. The people who were more heavily involved in the partnership, who volunteered for committee chair roles, would start to run their committee meetings during the allotted time for the monthly meetings. Karen would open the meeting and then

the committees would break out into different rooms throughout the library. It took a while for this structure to become the norm for how the monthly meetings were run. In fact, it was only my last meeting that I attended where this happened. One frustrating part of the new way of holding meetings was that once people broke into committees, there was no mechanism for them to come back together and tell the rest of the membership what the committee had worked on. People had to choose their committee wisely because that would be the only one in which they would really know what was happening.

For the most part, few general members did a lot of speaking within the partnership meetings. Out of 23 people present at the Jan 03 meeting, only 5 spoke. Executive board members would usually bring up something that was going on or maybe people who were heading up grants would give an update. Later, as they became more established, committee chairs would talk about their committees, but general members not in a "leadership" position did not often contribute to the conversation. I learned in my interviews and from some informal conversations with members around meetings, this feeling of inclusion did not pervade the meeting. In another example, one member who had not been at the previous meeting was having an informal conversation with me and said it was difficult for her to feel ownership in such a large group. Also, she said it was difficult to say what was on her mind when there were so many people at the meetings. She needed someone to draw out her opinion and make her feel that her voice was important (field notes, January 2003). Despite Karen's constant

and watchful eye over the meetings intended to make everyone feel warm and included, people felt lost. This was conveyed to me in the interviews.

Another way the partnership members, especially the executive board, espoused inclusion was through informality. They seemed to reason that if they preserved informal ways of communicating they would foster more of a feeling of inclusion.

#### *Informality as a Way to Preserve Inclusion*

At the beginning of the February 2003 meeting, the coordinator, Karen, was talking about her recent trip to Eastern State whose early childhood education program served as a benchmark to West State. She told the East County membership that they had a “real board of directors” back East and that members could not talk at the meetings if they did not sign up ahead of time. She admired their sense of structure, but did not feel this partnership would be comfortable with that way of working. She equated informality with inclusion. In anticipation of the annual meeting, where some of the organizational structure issues would be fleshed out, she emphasized that members had shared goals and values that brought them together to work on a partnership in early childhood education. Her appeal to the Unitarian interrelated principles is quite clear here. However, the specifics of those shared goals and values were never mentioned by Karen nor did the membership ask about them. One reason for not going down to the level of detail where specifics linger is the power of ambiguity to keep people united at a certain level. Also, this group’s inability to articulate exactly where they want to go with the partnership made details difficult. They have a vague notion and

vision of communication that point toward Unitarian principles of building a community, but insufficient tools to get there.

The partnership members seemed to be afraid to be too formal. During one meeting, the minutes from the previous month's meeting had not been e-mailed ahead of time so Karen passed out copies and gave the members a chance to read them over. After a few minutes, she asked, "Does anyone have any questions about the minutes? Are they, we haven't approved for so long." Another member spoke, "I suggest that we approve the minutes." Another member raised her hand, "I second." Then the member who suggested the minutes be approved asked, "All in favor?" Members raised their hands. "Any opposed, she asked? Ok, the minutes have been approved." Karen asked, "Are we done? Wow!" and she laughed and people around the room laughed and nodded their head in approval. Karen said, "We should do that more often." They were torn between preserving the informal and collegial nature they thought existed on the council and bringing in structure, formality and what they perceived to be legitimacy to their organization.

Similarly, they were conflicted between not turning anyone away yet also developing their partnership and getting business done. Somehow formality was considered the same as disclusion. If the group adopted formalities they would make people feel less included. They never talked about these fears or their reasons for wanting or not wanting formality. They rarely talked about communication, decision-making, voting, or where the partnership was going. They talked about news in the early childhood development world, training, grant

opportunities, and they talked up the annual meeting for about two months before it occurred. Karen and Estelle, both members of the executive board, embodied the tension between taking the partnership to the next step and preserving the community feel they so desperately wanted. Estelle urged the council to think about where they wanted it to go. Karen urged the council to think about membership. She said there were some members she had not seen for a year. Both of them espoused their desire for a formal structure, but meant very different things by that. They saw a structured and smooth moving group back East when they visited the state that had been doing something similar for ten years and was successful at it. They would not be able to see so easily, however, if the community feeling they wanted was in place back East unless they specifically asked people about that. Structure seemed to be the answer to all of their problems.

We see in people's talk indication of not feeling comfortable within a larger group, the cry for community, and the desire to feel a real part of something important. This points back to the Unitarian interrelated principle. These women, already bonded through their line of work and their experiences, wanted this partnership to be something they could dive into, make a difference in, and feel a part of. They wanted to do something that improved the quality of early childhood education; an issue they struggled with throughout their adult work lives.

*Toward Strong Democracy*

Another example in which inclusion was espoused as an ideal of communication by the partnership was in talking about Project Bloom. The project manager, Liz, was talking about the status of the program and advising the council on their progress. She espoused the preferences of cultural diversity. She said,

And I think we're really at the stage where we need to plan for our planning. It's kind of the first stage of strategic planning is planning to plan. And one of the things that we were concerned about and it (turning to the person to her left who was the only African American woman on the partnership and also a member of Project Bloom) came up even after you left is how we involve families in this planning process so that um, although there are many people on this council that may want to and need to be a part of this planning, and we'll need to um create a local governance group that will assist in that and really reach out and bring families into that process. And, I think, um that we also need to bring a wider range of cultural diversity into that process. I think one of the things we've run up against in our consultation is that people who are um, have different perspective on the way that children need to be taken care of based on cultural perspectives that we don't really understand and have representation around.

When she finished Karen added that she learned some things from the conference on Project Bloom that she had related to the partnership. She said,

I kept applying it to this council when in fact it has to do with Bloom and what they're doing although a lot of these people that are on this council can help with that. It made me aware of a lot of things. For one, that we don't on this council have um parents representing, as they should or even consumers of childcare. We have no one here that actually pays for childcare. Well, not that you guys don't pay as parents, pay for child care, you may, but what I think we need is somebody who pays for child care but doesn't serve on an agency that provides service in the area of early ed... You think that you're up and ready to run with this and then you have to stop and take your glasses off and look real closely, do I really have everyone at the table that I need or do I just feel comfortable with what I have. And I think that is something we should look at especially this coming year as really a true goal. I mean it's on our goals to go and look



at we keep expanding, expanding, expanding in terms of the county and the pilot but we do still have some gaps that would be nice to address and keeping those things in mind um as we start to address them. The other thing I don't want is that I don't want a person who is just gone and picked out because they meet one single criterion and you can get them to come Wednesday at 10:30. You know I want to try to be really conscientious about who we choose and whether or not they really want to come.

Both Liz and Karen highlighted the central concern of the partnership.

They talked about the early childhood community and who was missing from it.

It is not surprising that these women who work in the early childhood profession would be concerned about including parents in their work. Ensuring parents are aware of their child's needs is often a concern for day care centers, schools, both mental and physical health care providers and others. The fact is their focus is never far away from preserving their community and making people feel welcome and included.

This was not the first time the partnership sought input from a parent.

While many of the members were parents themselves, they felt someone who was solely representing parents was a missing voice in the partnership. This idea came up in meetings, informal conversations and in many interviews (field notes, February 2003). This was a topic that could unite them.

The way we can differentiate this talk as being Unitarian and not about representation or decision-making and liberal democracy is by paying attention to the talk and the context around it. The embedded preferences in their actions did not show representation. They continued on with their business, working towards deadlines, writing grant proposals without many of the representation they espoused they wanted and needed. The partnership itself had very little cultural

diversity. Nor did a parent representative join the partnership during my eighteen months in the site.

While they talked about it several times, there was no follow through or person responsible for turning that lack of representation into an action item. What they focused on was the feeling of inclusion, of building community, of coming together, sharing core values and accomplishing their very important work. While some of the preferences of communication embedded in talk worked against this desire to make people feel included, the members knew the partnership had issues and they did not feel as accepted and important in the group. The membership struggled with articulating exactly what they meant and the coordinator just kept talking. That is why they might look liberal democratic at one point, humanistic psychological at another point, and Unitarian in another spot. They were struggling to know what to do. If we dig deeper, however, they never stray from their espousal of coming together as a community to solve problems and accomplish tasks.

Despite their best effort to develop a community collaboration, the members were blocked by insufficient tools to articulate where they wanted to go. This led to a clash between the preferences of communication they espoused and the preferences they enacted through their talk. This led to unintended consequences as seen in meetings.

## MEETINGS AS A PLACE TO SHOW THE TENSION BETWEEN ESPOUSED AND EMBEDDED PREFERENCES

Karen's actions during meetings however were embedded with preferences that worked against inclusion and pointed toward a reason why members of the partnership did not speak up during meetings. For example, during the Feb 03 meeting, only Karen and Estelle spoke for the majority of the meeting. Karen brought up the need to map resources throughout the county so everyone would have an idea what services different groups offered. She tried to persuade the other members that this was a good idea. Estelle spoke about the school readiness grant. The example I am referring to is the same sample of meeting interaction presented in chapter four where Estelle suggested that the partnership change direction and start to meet as committees rather than a large group. Karen focused on the fact that they had tried an every other month meeting in the past and it had not worked. She shut Estelle down and went on with the agenda. This was a fairly typical way for a meeting to run.

In a rare example where a partnership member challenged information Karen brought to the table, Karen's way of responding embedded preferences that did not welcome the opposite point of view. Karen was talking about the process in place that ensured childcare center inspectors from the council met reliability standards. Reliability meant that the council member's answers match the answers of someone who has already been determined to be reliable. She explained the process commenting at the end that it costs the council extra money because the assumption is that the council members are not reliable vs. the person

who is predetermined to be reliable. Karen had spoken to other council coordinators who did not think the system was fair and had decided to spend the money they would have spent on inspectors, directly on services for the child care center. One of the council members objected.

1 Karen: But that's how the system is set up. So that if our person doesn't match  
2 them, it's because our person is wrong, whereas

3 Pauline: No, that's not how it works.

4 Karen: Well my understanding

5 Pauline: No, because the reliable person could lose their reliability

6 Karen: At the same time

7 Pauline: They could lose their reliability, if they don't, they both have to match  
8 86%

9 Karen: But then but then if but then if they don't match

10 Pauline: They can both lo, it depends on, there's a very specific way that they  
11 determine between the two of them who's right, and whoever's wrong

12 Karen: ok

13 Pauline: on more than 86%, it could be ours or it could be the core reliable who is  
14 their's

15 Karen: Well our experience has always been that it's always us that has been  
16 wrong

17 Pauline: Well

18 Karen: and maybe that has changed

19 Pauline: Well, yeah, I think, no I think you're right

20 Suzanne: No you have to be able to be really strong and totally back off and be  
21 like why do you think it should be this and they have to then be like ok I think  
22 you're right and then

23 Karen: Has that ever happened in your experience?

24 Pauline: (laughs), pretty rarely

25 Karen: (laughs ) ok and so I guess, my point is, my point is that it's um

26 something for us to at least to discuss.

Karen did not shut down the conversation in this example. She allowed Pauline and Suzanne to speak but at the end ensured the rest of the partnership knew the way it normally happened was the way she initially described it. There was a lot of laughter around this incident; it was not a tense or conflict ridden, yet the embedded message was clear. Karen had the information correct from the beginning and while Karen wanted people to feel welcome at the meetings, she did not necessarily want to include people in decision-making tasks. She just wanted to inform them of the problem as she saw it. The annual meeting was also not a place where the partnership was involved in decision-making.

#### *The Annual Meeting*

The annual meeting was held in the library conference room, but the room, for the first time, was expanded to its full capacity making it much more rectangular shaped and less square. The tables were set-up in a horseshoe shape with the contracted facilitator behind a podium at the front of the room, next to the white, dry erase board that was always in the room. The contracted facilitator, Brenda, who had also facilitated their meeting the year before on the partnership's goals, used a large flip chart of white paper. The meeting was scheduled from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Pizza was to be delivered at noon to the room and the facilitator said she would give 5-minute breaks every hour. Estelle, the facilitator-elect, who introduced Brenda, started the meeting off by thanking everyone present for their "dedication to collaboration" (Estelle, 16 Apr 03 partnership meeting). She also said, "Because the partnership is struggling with the business

of how to get the work done, this meeting will concentrate on organizational structure". She then introduced Brenda.

Brenda started the meeting by saying she was flattered to be asked back a second year to facilitate the annual meeting. She set up some ground rules such as no side conversations and laid out expectations for the meeting. From the very beginning of this meeting, although in the same place with the same usual attendees, the feeling was much different. She asked the members to say out loud what they valued about being part of the council. With specific regard to communication, members espoused values of networking, collaboration, making connections with one another, sharing, having shared goals, and hearing the voice of the private sector.

In monthly partnership meetings, however, little communication occurred between members making networking, collaboration, connections, and sharing virtually impossible. The embedded values did not match their espoused values in that they never demanded that the communication be less dissemination style and more interactive. When asked to think about it, however, the members came up with several things that were important to them that were not occurring in their own meetings.

Another disconnect occurred between the espoused and embedded preferences of the facilitator, Jane, who was contracted to facilitate the meeting. She used management terms to discuss leadership, effective committees, and what people want to know as members of the group. Firstly, she told the partnership members what they wanted. She said people want to know, "Where am I going,



how am I doing, and what's in it for me?" This partnership may have wanted to know those things, but from my observations they were much more concerned about coming together and doing a good job for the community, than finding out what was in it for them personally. These were early childhood education professionals who were for the most part used to putting others before themselves. Brenda also said that good leadership used clear communication, valued everyone's opinions, and listened. Yet she spent much more talking than listening. She talked for about forty-five minutes on what tools were necessary for changing structure and only at the end did she break the meeting participants up by groups to work on the goals for the committees. Several of the attendees had not heard those types of terms used before, yet no one asked any questions or made any comments about what Jane was saying.

The annual meeting focused on changing the structure of the partnership in an attempt to make it better. In the room that day, there must have been many different ideas about what structure meant and how it would be changed to make it better. Brenda started by reviewing the existing way the partnership was set up. At the time, there were forty members with approximately twenty-three regularly attending. No one spoke out and said that the partnership was too big, although some had expressed that during our interviews. Karen continued to push her ideal of inclusion. She said, "There are still gaps. We need membership that we don't currently have." Then Brenda moved on to naming the six committees the partnership thought was necessary and defining their responsibilities. The naming came almost entirely as suggestions from the executive board. Next, Brenda

talked about the executive board positions. Estelle, the facilitator- elect board member, suggested the board be expanded to include the committee chair people. The only person who had a comment on this topic was a woman who had never attended a partnership meeting before. She worked at the YMCA and Karen had invited her to attend the annual structure meeting, an awkward meeting, some might say to invite a new person. This new person said, "The committee chair can't be an officer of the board because of conflict of interest. There will be power issues." Estelle acknowledged her concern by saying, "Hmmm," and then told the new person that would not happen with this group. In this way, one executive board member squelched conflict almost immediately and unquestionably.

Undoubtedly, the annual meeting on structure left some members feeling like their concerns had not been addressed. The pervasive ambivalence in most monthly meetings, but especially in this annual meeting that everyone put so much emphasis on is problematic. One issue was, however, they had no explicit training on how to bring their concerns up. They had no model from which to work with so in many of their minds, their meetings were typical collaborative meetings. Yet meetings and interviews were not the only place preferences of communication emerged.

*Preferences Found in Places Other than interviews and meetings*

While this chapter focused on meetings and chapter six focused on interviews, I also saw espoused and embedded preferences about communication elsewhere in written documents including agendas, emails and organizational

documents. At first glance, I thought none of these documents contained anything other than information. Neither the bylaws nor the “ideal list,” which was generated by the partnership as goals included explicitly espoused preferences of communication. Two grant proposals, however, espoused preferences of communication. Part of the school readiness grant established a transdisciplinary team that would visit childcare centers in an effort to reduce the number of expulsions from the center and increase their five star rating, a state defined scale of quality of childcare. The partnership believed this should be done under a “coaching, mentoring model,” unlike a typical inspection team that went looking for infractions. Another grant, the learning cluster grant, which provided training at child care centers, focused on helping communication between parents and teachers, adults and children and between staff members. No specifics were provided with regard to what “helping” meant. Both of these examples fit the Unitarian cluster and show this group’s devotion to bringing people together and approaching their work in a nurturing way.

But when I reviewed the agendas and emails I discovered the preference for information appeared over and over again. The agendas espoused a preference for order and for topics Karen deemed important for the group. The emails, which I saved over the eighteen months in a separate folder in my computer, numbered 107 and talked about a variety of topics including studies on immunizations, naps, literacy, and socioemotional screenings, upcoming training sessions, workshops, job openings, higher education, grants, legislative action in the state that impacted early childhood education. Also, the emails espoused

Unitarian preferences as they celebrated partnership accomplishments such as having grants funded, and winning battles over legal or legislative issues that affected young children. After the structure changed and the committees became more active, emails would go out asking for volunteers to serve on committees and then sometimes giving information about what happened in the committee meeting for the rest of the partnership to read. They started a partners e- mailing list in March of 04 which sent out messages to the entire group for the first time ever. Around the same time they also got their web site up and running making resources, networking, and information more readily available.

## SUMMARY

While preferences of communication emerged everywhere, meetings were the core place and time that this group got together. Since they did not have physically collocated offices, they used the monthly meetings to get their work done. This work, however, was new to most of them. The state legislation labeled the group as a collaboration and a public/private partnership. This way of organizing was unclear, challenging, and ambiguous to most of them and they were not sure how it would play out. They were fumbling, trying to understand how their work should be done. The status quo seemed to win out with meetings where only Karen and occasionally, the executive board spoke. This is not a new concept to volunteer type organizations. We have all been a part of a group where people come together who are really interested in a certain topic and/or cause and

feel that joining others who have the same passion would be good. Figuring out exactly where to go with the group, how to make the most difference is a difficult task. This group really wanted to grow and did not have the necessary skills to articulate how to do so. They allowed people to take charge and just hung back and listened and watched. Yet it is only the groups in which we have a major responsibility that we actively take charge of our role. The consequence of a normative mode of communication designed to bring people back was actually leading people away.

Of note, people expected relatively very little from communication. The members did not seem very surprised by the lack of getting things done. They did not seem to expect much from the partnership. They did not know how to articulate that expectation so apathy and ambivalence became the norm.

The heuristic proposed in chapter two helps me fill out the fragments of people's talk. Some of the words people use point toward one set of interrelated preferences, yet after digging deeper into the context, I discovered that they point elsewhere. Words are often familiar to people so they use them, such as the word collaboration or consensus, but what their other talk and the context around their talk points to is a much different idea.

Espoused norms of communication were mainly about inclusion and building community. These preferences are rooted in the Unitarian interrelated principles. The board wanted so much to help people feel welcome, that they did not expect much from them. In turn, the members also learned not to expect much. The board's intentions were to embrace people, yet they made them feel

like outsiders by not involving them. The members wanted desperately to be included and to do something, but their native ways of communicating kept the cycle of feeling excluded and not speaking out about it. The group shied away from formality equating it with disclusion. The preferences for information was important to some of the members as evidenced by them sitting and listening at many of the meetings I observed. This preference of communication can be traced back to the rational/argumentative/information interrelated principles that embraces the transmission view of communication. Some people were completely satisfied with the fact that they came to meetings, received information, and were able to then take it back to their organizations. Other partnership members wanted to be involved in task completion and decision-making within the group. They wanted the information but also active involvement and to feel a part of the community effort. These were the people who wanted to "do," rather than to simply listen.

Another group of people cared less about being a part of decision-making, but truly wanted that feeling of being a part of something important. They wanted to have a place in the community and be accepted and valued for what they had to offer. They just did not know exactly how to go about tackling that. It was difficult to distinguish between preferences of the decision-making group in meetings other than to note who wanted to become involved in projects, programs, grants, and issues.

These meetings offered me a way to look at people's talk and see its effects to some degree. Meetings are excellent places to see the disconnect

between people's espoused preferences of communication and the embedded choices in their talk. I found that they could only legislate what they were not ready to commit their hearts to. In other words they turned to structure for many different reasons and with many different expectations hoping it would be easier than talking about communication. Changing the structure was of central importance to the partnership because everyone agreed that it was important.

A lot came out in the interviews that were not mentioned in meetings. People's talk during interviews espoused preferences and was embedded with choices that would not be evident from reviewing meeting data alone. They talked about communication much differently than they performed it. Consequently, other than me and the person saying it, these ideas, frustrations, tensions, etc. were rarely heard. Their normative communication espoused their preferences. They sat in meetings and rarely spoke, yet during interviews they vented their frustration about having information disseminated with no lateral communication. Additionally, they preferred inclusion so strongly, they would almost never argue, disagree, or try to refocus a meeting. They would never do or say something that might hurt the feelings of another. The interview provided protection for them to say what was on their minds. In the meetings, it would not be acceptable to aggressively pursue an idea that directly conflicted with someone else's idea. These were gentle, soft, warm and compassionate people who felt very much like they were the same as the person sitting next to them. In fact, while involvement seemed to be associated with communication preference as discovered in interviews it also seemed to be associated with communication

preference in meetings. Those who were minimally involved said nothing in meetings. Those who wanted more involvement may have spoken out in meetings trying to become involved in a task or to build a relationship. Consequently, their meetings were less about interaction and more about dissemination of information. This was perfectly acceptable to some members, while leaving other members feeling dissatisfied

They did not want to shut the door on anyone. They struggled with wanting to continue to include anyone who wanted to join and managing a difficult situation with rotating meeting attendees. It was very difficult for them to do their work when they had to start over with new people all of the time. They felt they needed more and more members in their group to have it feel like a community and represent who was in the community yet the people involved were not really participating. Chapter eight explores the consequences of the preferences the partnership chose to enact.



## CHAPTER 8: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

Because the world is constantly changing, requiring creative and innovative solutions in business, government, and local communities, collaboration offers a unique way of organizing to meet changing needs. Public/private partnerships, a particular type of collaboration, are rising in importance and popularity because of the unique blend of resources they offer to solve problems. People cannot work together to solve these problems without communication. "As stakeholders share their individual appreciations about the problem, a more comprehensive understanding of the problem emerges" (Gray, 1989, p. 239). Showing how people's communication affects collaboration may be helpful to those involved in alternative ways of organizing.

People carry into collaborative efforts their own concepts and practices of communication. They have ideas about how communication should work, and what is successful interaction. This study has explored these ideals as communication preferences. These practices do not stand alone. They are connected to larger views about what communication is supposed to do and what it means to be human. Clustering the preferences helps me pose important differences in the data. For example, what is the purpose of communication, where are sites of meaning, and what is the significance of interaction? While often unintentional, communication preferences bring about consequences that will effect what the group is trying to accomplish.

I observed the way preferences about communication emerged from people's talk both explicitly and also embedded in their interaction. Specifically,

I conducted scheduled interviews and recorded monthly meetings as data. Some of the embedded preferences supported their espoused choices of communication, while others directly conflicted. I use both scholarly and professional literature to look for differences that mattered. These differences formed the five interrelated principles of communication. I was able to cluster the data into certain reoccurring practices and see how those communication practices relate to the principles.

The group I analyzed was the warmest, most inviting group of women I have ever met who had a passion for early childhood education yet were struggling, trying to figure out how they could make a difference. As a result, the meeting data I collected was not the interaction between partnership members that I expected. Karen, the coordinator, was the predominate voice in meetings. She set the agenda and went item by item down the agenda until she had transmitted all of the information to the meeting attendees. The membership remained silent. It seemed they were too polite to challenge her. Without an adequate model of communication, they often failed to accomplish the things they most wanted. My meeting data was largely one voice and very disappointing.

The members of the partnership were conflicted. They all wanted the information the partnership offered, yet some also wanted more. Some members wanted to be included in accomplishing tasks and making decisions for the larger project that was to improve the quality of childcare in East County. Others wanted to build relationships among members of the partnership. Some wanted anyone and everyone to feel welcome, and did not want to ask too much of them.

This included not questioning the status quo of meetings in order to play a more active role. All of the different approaches to communication left people feeling dissatisfied at times. It also created some tensions and unintended consequences.

The model of communication they brought into the interaction was founded on the need for similarity, the spirit of community and the need to share information. Communication was primarily viewed as being reproductive. Scholars advocating strong democracy would require considerable diversity within a group to allow for the creativity necessary to create solutions everyone could live with. My group saw no need for diversity, but considered it more as a problem to have people different from themselves. Difference was not necessarily desirable to this group. They did not focus on finding creative solutions based on their differences, but found solace in their commonality and thought they could struggle together on a common problem to reach solution. They did something similar to what Medved's et al. (2001) group did which they named the homophily tension or the desire to surround yourself with others who are like you. Similarly, my group wanted people like themselves on the partnership, more parents, and always an open door. Also, this desire for unity may have been one reason they did not articulate their native theories of communication, which were different.

Because they never went beneath the surface, there were differences among themselves they could not see. During meetings they rarely brought issues up from their own points of view let alone argued over an issue. They stayed neutral and stuck to information. They were unable to articulate what they should

do. This was clearly seen by the lack of involvement of the general membership at the monthly meetings. Perhaps even more so it was particularly apparent at the annual meeting about structure when no one questioned the paid facilitator on her recommendations except for someone who had never attended a partnership meeting before. The normative way of communicating when similarities are emphasized rather than differences does not include new ways of thinking, diversity, different perspectives, or individual experiences. Structure, although defined and conceptualized differently, was seen as the answer to their problems. With all of the members united under the early childhood education umbrella, they had different preferences of communication depending on many factors, which were never talked about but produced outcomes for their organization. The following section summarizes the answers to the research questions that guided this study.

### ANSWERING RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This dissertation was designed to answer six research questions. The first question was, "How do people see collaboration? Do they link it to communication?"

The members of the partnership liked to use the word collaboration. Not only was it brought up in interviews and meetings, but also members used the term outside of the partnership. They never discussed, however, what collaboration meant or entailed or what each of their roles were in collaboration. As Gray (1989) argued, "Not only do stakeholders need to appreciate the necessity of joint activity in order to join together, but also they must delimit the

problem domain and reach agreement on how they will collaborate before they can even begin to address the substance of any transaction” (p. 229). I have no doubt that the members of this group heard the term collaboration used over and over again, and that they each had their own ideas about what it meant, but they never talked about how they should go about collaborating.

One of the founding members of the East County partnership was elected to a neighboring county’s board of education. In their 2004 annual report, they showed pictures of each of the seven representatives and a brief quote. The partnership member was the only one to use the word, “collaboration.” She said, “It is the Board’s responsibility to ensure that we are all working collaboratively to enable every child to learn.” I provide this example as well as others throughout the paper to show the broad meanings people assigned to the term “collaboration.” Also, I use this example to show how often members of the partnership referred to what they were doing as collaboration.

The members called themselves by many names. Even the legislation that established the group called it both a collaboration and a public/private partnership. From chapter one we know that many people use these terms to mean other types of groups than the ideals the name “collaboration” and “public/private partnership” hold. My group called itself a collaboration for the duration of its existence; they also called themselves a “council,” and a “pilot.” The naming actually became a sticking point as it was often difficult to distinguish between the general membership and the executive board. It was only after Estelle brought up her vision one time in a meeting of evolving into a

partnership, and when they decided it was easier to file for 5013C status if they called themselves a partnership, that they “officially” changed the name and began to refer to themselves as such during meetings and on their web site. The implications of their name choice are many. A collaboration denotes many points in its ideal form (see Heath and Frey, in press). Buying into that definition in any complete way requires extensive commitment on the part of the members. Yet people have varied definitions of what collaboration means and even deeper, they hold varied preferences of communication depending on the situation. Would interaction with your child evoke the same preferences of communication as interaction with an old friend or a religious figure or a superior? It was not only in the interviews and meetings that preferences of communication arose, but also in other locations.

Both the terms “collaboration” and “public/private partnership” are buzzwords, literally “thrown around” to mean anything from working together to truly understanding each other’s point of view and working toward a goal that represents a win-win for both sides. Their preferences of communication stemmed from the Unitarian interrelated principles where core values unite them and consensus keeps them focused toward a community goal. Their normative communication, which was intended to be inclusive and inviting, fits with their broader definition of collaboration. This definition includes anything along the realm of working together. They all agreed that communication was important to collaboration, but did not think that any of their problems were communication related. They did not link communication to collaboration. I do not mean to

claim that they did not use the term “communication” when talking about what was important within collaboration. They viewed communication as relational and structural and did not see it as salient or problematic. Despite their espoused preference of inclusion, however, so many of them were frustrated and felt left out. It seemed to me that the members chose to use the term partnership after the annual meeting where they re-configured the organization’s structure.

Unanimously and without debate, the members turned to the idea that working on the structure would improve the organization and alleviate their frustrations. The terms “partnership” and “collaboration” seemed to be matched with structure while communication as a root cause of a problem was largely ignored. Since they identified their problems with structure that was what they concentrated on. Their preferences of communication, communication practices, and norms of interaction were not topics that came up in meetings, yet the word “collaboration” was used all the time.

The second question was, “How, when, and by whom are espoused preferences of communication expressed in a collaborative process?” The clusters of preferences of communication that emerged from scheduled interviews with members of the East County public/private partnership say something about how they treated interactions. However, as answered in the first question, the members did not necessarily associate communication with collaboration. Surprisingly, they talked very little about ideals of communication explicitly. They did, however, all talk about their need for information.

Some espoused a preference for being a part of task completion, for example, decision-making. Finally, some members expressed a preference of communication around building relationships. Regardless of the preferences of communication they espoused, their choices produced outcomes. The implications of their preferences follow.

### *Information*

For those members who judged communication on receiving information, giving information, or using the partnership as a clearinghouse for information, their preferences fell into this cluster. The people who rated the council a success, a “5” out of “5” were perfectly happy coming to meetings, listening to information, and taking it back to their stakeholder organizations. The consequences of them being so positive about the meetings were that they were less likely to participate but preferred to sit and listen. They did not voice criticism. They looked at other people’s dissatisfaction as being odd. They could not understand what was wrong with the communication in the meetings just as it was. They were minimally involved in the partnership. They attended meetings when some topic interested them, but largely were not regular attendees. These are the people who became highly frustrated when the annual structure meeting revamped the organization so the opportunity for simply coming to meetings and leaving with no strings attached vanished. The new structure was designed so that people had to join committees and participate.

The fact that people were completely satisfied with information being the emphasis of communication is not particularly surprising. Lots of people perceive



information transfer as the primary purpose of communication. For example, Reddy's (1979) conduit metaphor has dominated organizational communication for years. Despite 20 years of the critique that communication is much more, we still see that way of thinking about communication enacted. They do not see organizational issues as related to communication, but instead look to structure or people's personalities as the thing to change. These native views of communication based on information transfer came from people's experience in their lives and stakeholder organizations. They carried these notions of communication into the collaboration from the outside. They seemed to have no idea that their communication would have to change to be involved in a public/private partnership.

People are constantly trying to find ways to meet the challenge of today's world. Collaborative public/private partnerships are one way of doing this. People who are involved in these types of organizations, however, do not necessarily understand the ideal of collaboration and public/private partnerships as defined by law. The law specifies decision-making process, while the participants see it simply as a structure. In my site, participants were part of a state legislated program whose purpose was to "fix" early childhood care and education. The hope of collaborating with public and private partners to accomplish this tasking was exciting for people passionate about the cause. Without the attention to participative processes, however, they were not able to make joint decisions or actualize the full intent of the law that established their group. From an information view, I saw at the end of my study signs of

frustration with trying to preserve the information as a primary purpose of communication within an evolving structure that was beginning to expect more. For example, the members of the board who thought information should be tailored so people could take it home, struggled when the meetings were larger. How do you tailor information for so many people? It was easier for them when the meetings were smaller. Other members of the board tried to disseminate all of the information for the entire month at the meetings. They also became frustrated because the 2-hour meeting time was insufficient to transmit all of that information. The coordinator, a position designed as an administrator, not a leader, did the majority of the talking. The people who just wanted the information became frustrated when more was expected of them. This view of communication as information ties back to the rational/argumentative/informational set of interrelated principles where transmission is of utmost importance.

### *Decision-making*

For those people who espoused preferences of communication around working on tasks, the consensus was usually that they wanted to be involved in decision-making and working, not talking. They perceived communication as good when their opinions were heard and included in decision-making and when they were working on a collective goal. They were frustrated sitting in meetings and just listening. They wanted action, not talk. They wanted responsibility and to feel an important part of the group. They did not know how to articulate their desire and the board never seemed to involve the rest of the membership in on the

decision-making. Some of the board members wanted to inform the rest of the membership, but only so those members could take that information back to their stakeholder organizations. Giving them information was not explicitly to enable them to be involved in decision-making. The board did, however, want the general membership's involvement with task completion such as working on the annual Quality Forum, working on grant applications, etc. Those who wanted to be busy and work on projects were satisfied. Those who wanted to be included in decision-making were not satisfied; they felt left out and not part of the partnership. People who are dissatisfied stop coming to meetings and never put 100% of their talents into an effort that they feel left out of or uncomfortable with. The consequences are that the partnership lost out on people who were more than willing and able to put in some time and work hard on projects. They were willing to commit to the level a collaboration requires, but did not have the skills to articulate that point.

The preferences of communication that belonged to the decision-making cluster came from the larger Unitarian interrelated principles. Above all, the partnership members whose preferences of communication were to make decisions, wanted to do so by developing common core values. They strongly believed in and wanted to improve early childhood education in their own community. They supported consensus, common goals, and embracing their commonalities. Because they were not involved in decision-making, they felt left out. Also, looking at the world from an overarching Unitarian perspective means they missed out on any benefit they would gain from capitalizing on their

diversity. The nature of a public/private partnership means that people are coming from vastly different stakeholder organizations. While they are all related by early childhood education, they have distinct backgrounds and experiences, which could produce much more creativity and innovation in deciding the direction of the partnership and the goals it wanted to accomplish. For some, the tasks were not the preference of communication, building relationships were.

### *Relationships*

This group of women worked in early childhood education for the majority of their careers. They constantly struggled with being underfunded, undervalued, and underpaid. When the opportunity to come together and have the power to make a difference arose, it was exciting. In her interview, Penny talked about the dream coming true of being a member of the partnership and able to change the laws to help children. These members valued the strength of building relationships and having the support of one another. They were passionate and excited about improving the quality of care for children. To them, communication preferences were those that brought them together, united them in their cause and stressed the importance of community. When people felt left out, as if they did not matter and they were not included, they experienced what they had always experienced in their professional life—being on the outside. This was a bad feeling for them. The rejection made them feel like outsiders. Kathryn and Sarah, owners of a private day care chain, expressed this feeling in their interviews. While the partnership was very happy they took time out for the meetings, this was never expressed to Kathryn and Sarah either through espoused

or embedded communication practices and it made them feel like outcasts. This relationship cluster is tied to the Unitarian interrelated principles.

Communication is good when it brings people together. As mentioned above, this view of communication focuses on what can be accomplished together and largely ignores the power diversity brings.

The third question was, "How are embedded preferences of communication put into play? How do they compete in actual talk?" As mentioned before, the meetings, where I expected to see a lot of embedded preferences of communication were virtually void of interaction and disappointing. The clusters of preferences that emerged, however, were the same as those that emerged from the interviews. People's preferences for communication centered on information, decision-making and building relationships. The distinction between interviews and meetings was that people espoused their preferences in different ways. For example, the information cluster did not emerge from people explicitly talking about their value of information, but it was embedded in their ability to sit and listen during meetings and not ask questions or bring up ideas. The actual meetings I observed were very different from what I thought they would be. I envisioned interaction and exchange of ideas, thoughts, feelings, stories, and work on issues, but instead, it was more of the transmission of information from the coordinator. The decision-making cluster emerged from talk within the meetings about getting business done. One way it was constantly brought up was the tension between keeping an open door in meetings and having a consistent membership that could accomplish

work. It was cyclical. As the executive board tried to make a decision or accomplish some work, they would not fill in the rest of the group on all of the information. Because people did not ask questions or actively participate in meetings, the executive board was the only consistently attending group of people with all of the information who made decisions.

The relationships cluster emerged by the types of talk that went on during meetings. For example, the way Karen ran the meetings by fostering what she considered to be a warm and inviting environment. Talk around budget cuts and challenges of working in early childhood education were ideas all of the members could rally around. In other words, concentrating on their similarities and encouraging people to come back to meetings trumped any of their differences and was designed to make them feel part of a group that would offer them support. One of my favorite points that Karen brought up was the fact that her son was working at a doggie day care and that the people who sent their dogs there had no problem paying for their care as compared to parents who complained that the cost of childcare was so high. People around the meeting nodded. They were united in feeling that childcare was often overlooked as important and worthy of spending money. The consequence of building their relationship through similarities was, however, that they did not accomplish much work or make decisions.

The fourth question was, "How are both kinds of preferences reproduced through communication practices?" The answer to this question lies within the answers to the previous two questions. Espoused and embedded preferences

found in interviews and meetings demonstrated the same three clusters of preferences: information, decision-making, and relationship-building. People who wanted the communication within the group to be about information transmission would be put off by those who put the emphasis on relationship-building. Similarly, those who wanted to build bonds between themselves and other members were not interested in making decisions. With no discussion around any of this, the members remained frustrated.

The fifth question was, "What are the implications of tensions between espoused and embedded preferences?" This answer has also been covered in previous answers. Despite the partnership's main concern of making people feel welcome, the lack of process rules, transmission-type communication, and lack of interaction made it a place where many people did not feel welcome. While the legislation that established their partnership charged them to make decisions and make a difference in early childhood education, they worked more on developing their similarities and not using their differences to solve the problem they were tasked with creatively. One consequence of enacting the preference for building relationships was no follow through. Because of embracing inclusion above everything else, the executive board did not assign people to do certain tasks. Some people just wanted to do tasks and make decisions. They applied for every grant that came their way instead of choosing which made the most sense for the partnership. Another problem was they could not articulate where the partnership was going so how could they choose the most appropriate grants?

A difference example of lack of follow through was that for the 18 months I was with the partnership, they sought input from a parent member. No specific parent representative was ever a part of the partnership. This was the same reason big issues were not brought in front of the partnership. There was no direction, no common goal other than to "improve the quality of care in [East] County." When the group began discussing the current structure of the partnership, the members disagreed with what the standing committees were and who carried a vote within the membership. During these periods of disagreements, the mild mannered group rarely interrupted one another and no tension filled the room. People just let things go. One member said that nobody brought issues to the meetings and that they had not voted in a year; they had not taken a position on anything (field notes). The remainder of the meeting was spent defining what committees the partnership needed and then breaking up into groups and writing areas of responsibility for the committees. The members accepted what was brought up without question. One of the difficulties of studying the meetings of a group and not the conversations that took place after the meetings, on cell phones and emails was that maybe people did object, maybe they were angry and frustrated. It just never came out in the meetings, which says quite a bit about how their preferences of communication are enacted.

It all comes down to the fact that people did not feel included in this group but their normative ways of communicating kept them from speaking out. One of the founding members summed it up. "I would say that unfortunately, the organization is about the same. It's kind of like the good old boys network



(laughs) only the female version, it's like those that do, I think there's a natural connection to school districts and anybody else feels like I'm guessing, they're not in that close network" (interview with Betty). Despite trying to make people feel welcome in meetings, the executive board did most of the talking and all of the decision-making, which frustrated the other members and made them feel left out.

The sixth question was, "What are the implications of communicating certain preferences with respect to collaboration?" In other words, what is the significance of these three clusters in this site? What we see in these clusters is totally focused on the notion of expression. We do not see a focus on decision-making. A significant number of members wanted to be involved in the partnership only if there was something that affected them directly and only for the information pertaining to that specific issue for the duration they needed it. This is a very different level of involvement than someone who is committed to a long-term public/private partnership working to solve an increasingly problematic social issue in the community. Second, it shows another set of people who are highly frustrated because they do not feel like they are contributing because they are not actively working together on a project or involved in partnership decision-making. These people are potentially a huge asset. They are ready to work, motivated, committed, and devoted, they just need to feel like they are making a difference. Finally, there is a group of people who want to build relationships with other people. They want the support that comes from other people who understand what they dealt with in their jobs, the resources that could be

combined, and the sense of belonging to a cause was important to them. These are three logics used sometimes together and sometimes apart by people to communicate.

All the views of communication focused on expression within a community. The legislation wanted this group to solve problems in early childhood education. This required decision-making. However, that did not happen because of communication. The issue was they were not able to focus on any of the theories to work on how we make decisions together. Preferences of communication from the humanistic/psychological, liberal democracy, and strong democracy sets of interrelated principles did not come out of the partners' talk. One reason for this may be that the partnership members never evoked theories of communication that included decision-making. Because the purpose directs the model of communication, it is not surprising that the information and Unitarian interrelated principles were found. In many of the partners' minds, communication was good within the partnership as long as the information was flowing and as long as they were all together supporting one another. This was their native view of communication as information. The community piece came from their desire to gather support from each other and outweighed the importance of the individual. This made the humanistic/psychological and liberal democracy interrelated principles not preferable for this group of people. With their purpose primarily for information and to come together, decision-making was never really part of their communication model, which ruled out liberal democracy again. Also, normative communication for this group of early

childhood education professionals did not enable them to put strong democratic communication into practice. Other than Karen, they had no training in what it would take to successfully collaborate. Their skills lie in bringing people together not finding creative solutions based on their diversity.

### CONSEQUENCES

Paying attention to both espoused and explicit preferences, I observed several consequences from the preferences enacted by members of the partnership. First, the coordinator and executive board did the majority of talking during the meetings. The general membership rarely spoke and almost never argued or pointed out a conflict.

Second, the embedded preferences of people's talk during meetings worked against some of the preferences they espoused at meetings, particularly with regard to inclusion. For example, by ignoring the fact that people could not hear in the library conference room where meetings were held because of the noise from the ventilation system, requests to "scoot" chairs closer were frustrating to members who did not think they were being heard and understood.

Third, much of what the members brought up in our interviews was never brought up within the context of a meeting. Therefore, only the person who brought it up and I ever learned that person's feelings. The non-confrontational, nurturing and similarities- based nature of this group made bringing up any issues, disagreements, difficult questions or problems something that just was not done. Maybe if more people had known how that person felt, they would have understood better.

Fourth, the executive board often drew on two different sets of interrelated principles in order to use the power of both. For example, the board would want to accomplish some work so they would draw from the rational/argumentative/information interrelated principles. This would allow them to streamline the communication during meetings to be a one-way, clearinghouse, transmission style. Yet they would simultaneously employ preferences from the Unitarian interrelated principles in order to have an open door and allow anyone and everyone with an interest in early childhood education a spot at the table. The interrelated principles, however, had very different assumptions and overarching views which caused conflict and unintended consequences for the partnership.

Fifth, while they called themselves a collaboration sometimes and a public/private partnership other times, they did not necessarily associate communication with either of those terms. When they did, their normative ideas about communication did not enable them to reach outside their own boundaries to communicate.

Sixth, there seemed to be a relationship between the level of involvement in the partnership and the person's preferences of communication. The minimally involved people espoused preferences of information while the more involved people judged communication based on decision-making and building relationships.

Seventh, many members of the partnership recognized some of the issues that frustrated them, yet reproduced them. One consequence of people not talking

through process rules of communication is that they tend to reproduce what they are complaining about. Giddens (1984) explained this by saying that employees reproduce and legitimize the constraints that they face. This was evident in my site. For the most part, people did not speak up in meetings. They did not ask questions, talk about what they wanted or give suggestions.

## CONCLUSIONS

East County's partnership members are wonderful people. Their passion is admirable and unwavering. They thought it was enough that they cared. They had too much confidence that coming together was enough. Today's problems are too complex for traditional ways of organizing. While the process of collaboration offers so much hope, it also demands that its process be followed.

When people become involved in a collaborative effort, they do so with preconceived ideas about communication. These native forms tie into a larger belief system about how communication is supposed to work. Since collaboration is inextricably tied to communication, orientation to the collaboration process must explain this idea to people and work through the implications those beliefs have on the process. The heuristic can be used to fill in people's preferences of communication with a more complete look at how they think communication should work in the world. A facilitator trained in communication is imperative for training. Communication models are needed that facilitate participation, people working together, establishing priorities, conflict, making decisions, etc.

People who engage in collaborative endeavors need training. People left to their own devices cannot get close enough to where they need to be. They need

to engage in the change process and go through all the stages necessary to learn how to work in a different type of organization. Likewise, a systematic, periodic way of tracking the progress of the collaboration is necessary to make sure people are following the process rules, staying the course, etc.

The partnership members did not pay attention to process rules. It was not that they did not have access to them, Karen did. She chose not to embrace much of what she learned at the state level meetings. The rest of the partnership did not have sufficient training to know other process rules existed. People just did not grasp the concept of collaboration and public/private partnerships, nor the language to talk about communication. The job of collaborating, however, was the task they were given.

I agree wholeheartedly with Schwartzmann's assessment that meetings are a key place to study organizations and they "can no longer be taken for granted" (p. 111). Other scholars' meeting data and mine, however, were quite different. Specifically, with regard to alternative organizations, scholars often assert that everyone understands the normative structure of meetings. Yet, my meetings differed. For example, Mansbridge's (1983) account of town meetings in Selby, Vermont had much more participation and town member interaction than my community collaboration meetings had. Tracy and Craig's (2003) school board meetings also involved each person speaking their opinions. In my meetings, the same few people usually spoke. Meetings involve specific people in specific contexts and cannot be generalized.

I saw through my time with this group how they struggled to know what to do next and how some things worked and some did not. They tried very hard and in their definition were collaborating. I grew to feel I could associate with some of their growing pains since this was my first long-term study of communication. I felt all of my enthusiasm and excitement to see this group succeed, especially the closer I grew to them and the more time I spent with them, made the frustrations of their struggles my own. I have limitations that had consequences for this study much like they had in the partnership.

The people in the group seemed to let Karen take over. She went item by item down the agenda at many meetings and transmitted information. People said very little about her taking over meetings. I understand how this happened, because I did it too. My data was very much from Karen's perspective. I predominately called her to ask questions about the partnership out of convenience. She was easy to locate; her full time job was the coordinator of the partnership; I never felt as though I was taking her away from her "other job" like I did with other people. Likewise, my meeting data was very much from Karen's perspective. She did the majority of the talking. If I had this study to do over again, I would bring up these points in interviews and meetings and encourage people to talk more.

This study demonstrates the power of the relationship between training and leadership. Karen, although her job was intended to be administrative, was the leader of this partnership. The members told me the information flow throughout the council improved when Karen became the full-time coordinator.

They also said it put one single person in a leadership position that she was never meant to have. She made a lot of difference. Both my data and the outcome of the group would have been different without her. Despite the fact that she had access to alternative process rules and ways of communicating, she neither introduced this to the other members, nor enforced it. Her preferences of communication were highly influential in my site.

### PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

In some ways, the members of my group were set up for failure. The legislation that formed the partnership established it as a collaborative public/private partnership. However, they were never introduced to the process rules that would enable such a venture, nor was their adherence to such rules followed up on, institutionalized or adopted as a way of doing things. They took on a lot and thought if they loved the project enough, they could make it work. Both the state level and the county level participants need to keep in mind that collaboration requires an acculturation process sympathetic to it. People need experiences to become good at it. Regardless of how their experience affects their role in the partnership, these members have not been allowed to acknowledge that what they are doing is so different than what they are used to and so very complex. They have not been given permission to ask questions, to struggle, to discuss. They do not have the skills, the experience, or an understanding of the limits of their normative communication. It seems as though they were supposed to know what they were doing simply by walking through the door. This group desperately needs to know how important communication is and then reach an



agreement on how they are going to interact. Once that is done, they can decide the purpose and charge of their partnership and exactly what they are trying to accomplish.

Because of this I advocate that any intervention this group seek out include training on process rules of collaboration. They joined the group because it was alternatively organized and because they could improve early childhood education in their communities. The goal or objective of a collaboration is often vague in nature because the extent to which work can be done to solve a problem is inconceivable at the beginning. However, if the state had followed up to see that the East County participants were following the collaborative process the group would have determined for themselves their particular objective yet they had no idea how to talk about it. I do not think an intervention focused on individual competencies would be as helpful as a group learning process rules together and being able to keep the group on track. It is important to help this group understand that they had at least three different legitimate purposes represented by the three clusters of preferences of communication, information, decision-making, and building relationships. Without understanding the importance of the relationship between communication and collaboration, their belief systems that informed their preferences, and the different consequences, many participants became frustrated.

It was unfair to this group that the legislation established the partnership and then expected the participants to instantly be collaborative. Participation, especially collaboration within a public/private partnership is highly a cultured

skill. The bottom line is that learning a new process such as how to be a good member of a collaboration takes time. Most of the change that happened in my site occurred after my interviews and will take years. This is a long-term process with new ways of interacting that never seemed to click. People were struggling along the way to build communication. "For long periods, there may be no visible progress at all" (McLagan and Nel, 1995, p. 243).

It is my hope that by making the members of the partnership aware that their talk is action and that it is embedded with preferences of communication, they will see some of the tensions and disconnects that result. I hope that they will be able to see the power of communication, the role of preferences within it, and the unintended consequences that result from choosing one preference over another.

The people who serve on this partnership already recognize much of what needs to be changed within it aside from the communication aspect. They do not, however, feel comfortable bringing these issues up in meetings. Normative communication for them still very much exists in a transmission mode. While this satisfies some of the basic information needs of members on the partnership, it does not foster any lateral communication, relationship building, or mechanism for evaluation. This group does not see communication as a topic that needs to be talked about. They look to structure to solve problems of communication. They will require a trained communication professional to help them.

The organizational change literature explains how difficult learning a new process can be. For example, McLagan and Nel (1995) suggest leadership,

common values, and a structure that facilitates accountability is imperative for participative organizations. Chrislip and Larson (1994) argue that including all pertinent stakeholders, "creating a credible and open collaborative process," visible support from a recognized leader, and the support of institutions that could implement the changes of the collaboration are necessary. From my data we see many of these key points missing. Specifically for native ways of communication to change we need models that help people carry out a change. We also need to pay attention to how we track a group's progression. It must be tracked over a long time period, as a snapshot may not give an accurate account.

In any organization, but especially in a collaboration, it is important to set ground rules from the beginning. Communication and how it is going to occur must be discussed from the onset. Collaboration is an increasingly important trend in organizing with opportunities for creative solutions beyond most people's dreams. Yet we cannot expect people to succeed without training in something that is so different than the ways they have traditionally communicated. In this partnership people did not ask questions, they went along with the status quo. While the meeting was the only place the entire collaboration met, very few decisions were made in this forum. The executive board was making all of the decisions for the partnership outside of the meetings. New collaborations should consider training that explores what each member's preconceived notions are about collaboration and communication. From that, they could decide as a group what definition they wanted to adopt and how they were going to approach communication within that definition. Based on what they chose as ideals,

consequences could be explored. For example, enacting ideals of communication that come from the humanistic psychological interrelated principles may encourage people to feel valued, yet also contribute to a lack of decision-making. This may encourage a discussion around advantages and disadvantages of enacting certain values.

Key to this partnership's success is trying to get a language of decision making and understanding the connection between communication and decision-making. If people felt comfortable talking about process rules and decision-making, they could participate, and have the power to influence the process of collaboration. This would enable them to get the information they needed to make joint decisions.

One of the problems this partnership created with their turn to structure instead of communication is that they created an automatic block to inclusion by doing so, something that was so important to many of its members. By setting up a rigid structure of the executive board and committee chairs, they have re-enforced hierarchy and left some people who do not serve on the board or in chairperson functions feeling less involved and less powerful than the others. Also, where participation should be rewarded, it seems as though the coordinator looks for praise from the rest of the members for all she has done.

#### THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings in this dissertation project were different from what Ashcraft (2001), Cheney (1999), and Tracy and Craig (2003) found. First, both Ashcraft's (2001) and Cheney's (1999) groups had strong process rules and they took

communication seriously. They were devoted to process rules. The people in all of our groups were the same in that they came into meetings with their own notions of communication, but the explicit values in the meetings Ashcraft's and Cheney's groups attended overcame their normative ways of communicating and they adapted to the new ways. In fact, in Ashcraft's (2001) study they paid so much attention to process rules, they did not make decisions. But in my meeting, they never used process rules, and therefore, enacted their own preferences of communication. The leadership had to set up process rules and also enforce them. People do not enact changes leaders do not enact themselves.

Tracy and Craig (2003) found that people used communication strategically. In my site, I would argue that the people were not being strategic. They were a bit muddled; they struggled to articulate what they were thinking and what they were supposed to do next. Yet they were consistent in their struggle to find the "right" kind of communication it took to collaborate.

Ashcraft's (2001) study showed process rules devoted to preferences consistent with the humanistic/psychological interrelated principles. Her group employed ethical communication, a very particular way of interacting that they all agreed to. While my site had some of the same characteristics as Ashcraft's such as the fact that both groups were predominately women, both represented children, both wanted to improve the communities in which they lived, and both had notions of not being treated as second class citizens, they chose to enact very different preferences of communication. Ashcraft's (2001) study showed

preferences linked to the humanistic psychological principles, while my site largely ignored humanistic psychological preferences.

Cheney's (1999) Mondragon Cooperative members employed preferences from the liberal democracy interrelated principles. Their expectations for meeting attendance alone are quite strict and different from what participants in my site practiced by going to meetings sporadically. The members in my site did not have explicit process rules many of the other scholars reported. The people I studied had native views of communication, which they expected would transfer unproblematically over to the collaboration. They reasoned this by not associating communication with collaboration.

Other theoretical implications follow. First, this study demonstrates what preferences of communication people used in my site. People judge good and bad communication based on their preferences and larger belief systems. In an organization, where people come together to communicate, people's overall preferences may not be the same. Native models of communication do not ask what the theories they bring to a group as normative actually do. The consequences of each larger belief system people communicate from are varied. If a language to discuss the different belief system was accessible to a group, they could talk about their preferences. This could be helpful to the organization because it could present different ways of judging communication, thereby opening up different options for communication. Likewise it could be harmful to the organization if people become frustrated with other's preferred ways of communicating that may or may not conflict with their own. Regardless, if we

can make people aware of these differences we will eliminate some of the guessing on where the tension is coming from.

Preferences can be espoused and/or embedded in people's talk. At times, people's espoused preferences conflict with the preferences embedded in their talk. Also, the embedded preferences may not be what the person intends. Again, making them aware of these possibilities and their consequences may be helpful for an organization.

Regardless of whether or not a person intends for different consequences to occur, enacting certain preferences has consequences for organizations. Specific to this study, those who professed preferences from the rational/argumentative/information set of interrelated principles never pushed communication passed a transmission model. The executive board used meetings as a clearinghouse for information and the members accepted it. Those who wanted more, either to be involved in decision-making or building relationships espoused preferences from the Unitarian set of interrelated principles. They concentrated so much on doing tasks instead of sitting down and talking about what it meant to be a part of this organization and where they were headed that they just went in circles. Those who judged good communication based on relationship building spent so much time trying to make people feel welcome that they never accomplished anything.

Second, this study demonstrated how normative ways of communicating may hinder the ability to make joint decisions or creatively resolve shared concerns. In order to understand issues and make good decisions, it requires

sharing of information, agreement on how much information is necessary, encourages open access to everyone involved, etc. Also, collaboration requires building trust between people, which is part of building a relationship. Yet that cannot be the only focus in collaboration, as the goal will never be reached. It also requires building a language that facilitates decision-making.

This in-depth, longitudinal, qualitative study of how preferences of communication play out has implications for understanding what is necessary to make collaboration work. Communication must be highlighted and people need to be trained to collaborate. It is an overused term. People who find themselves involved in a group tasked to collaborate must first understand what that means and how it translates into every day communication practices. A person working with a group tasked to collaborate could not assume people know what it is or that they have the skills to collaborate simply because they joined the group.

The importance of all the members understanding and adopting a normative way of communicating that facilitates collaboration cannot be overstated. As Gray (1989) said, "the evolution of norms to guide the process and stakeholders who will adopt it must be identified and mutually sanctioned" (p. 237). Strong democracy coupled with a politically responsive constructionist theory of communication (Deetz and Simpson, 2003) that relies on mutual constitution outlines a way of communicating that would facilitate collaboration.

Those who do interventions in organizations need to understand the larger belief systems about communication behind people's preferences. Depending on their beliefs it may be more useful to help the participants focus on process rules



related to collaboration. On the other hand it may be more helpful for participants to focus on individual skills and competencies to facilitate collaboration. The interventionist, whether the day-to-day leader of the group or a consultant, must be knowledgeable in the needs of the group.

#### REFLECTIONS AND QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

This research study reflects a real group of women trying to do some good in the world. They did not associate communication with collaboration. They believed they were collaborating, and did not have the training necessary to work through many of the issues that hindered them. Their native ways of communicating, something we all have, made the process of making joint decisions out of reach. I was disappointed with their monthly meetings and really thought they would be much more participative and interactive. That being said, these women represent a large part of the community groups out there struggling to organize themselves in a way that they can make a difference. Therefore, research that informs these groups about the importance of communication and collaboration is invaluable. Training and leadership are key parts of the collaboration process.

Other questions requiring further examination follow. Do certain types of organizations tend to reflect a certain cluster of communication preferences? Are certain preferences more suited to collaboration? Once people are made aware of the consequences of their preferences, what training facilitates learning new ways to communicate? Are preferences of communication that point to overarching ways of thinking about communication tied to overall value systems? Does a

specific model of communication exist for people to learn how to collaborate?

What should such a model look like?

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Below is the interview schedule. After I list the questions, I provide explanations of why I chose to ask these questions.

1. Tell me a little bit about your history with this group?

- a. Why do you participate?
- b. What is your role in the group?
- c. Why does your organization participate?

Question one was designed to get interviewees talking and comfortable. They provided information about their stakeholder organizations, and their ideas about being part of this group.

2. What does it mean to collaborate?

Can you give me an example that epitomizes this?

Question two tries to get at how each person defines collaboration and what is important to them in the way they see collaboration working. Their answers draw out explicit or metacommunicated values about collaboration.

3. What is the purpose of your group?

Question three probes the mission and goals of their group. Their answers may show the “official” mission or goal statement or their own personal ideas.

Phrasing such as “what the coordinator said” or “our mission statement reads” give away whether or not they are reiterating an official position they may or may not have had a part in creating.

4. How does communication work in your group?

- a. Would you describe it as good or bad and why?
- b. Tell me a little bit about the culture of your group.

Asking about normative views of communication was designed to get the members talking about their perceptions of communication with regards to the group. Asking about culture was supposed to gather their definitions of culture and shed light on some of the artifacts, practices, symbols, etc. of the group.

5. How would you explain the way the council is structured?

- a. What are the processes your group follows?
- b. Describe how decisions get made.
- c. Give an example of a decision made.
- d. Where do decisions get made?
- e. Who is the boss?
- f. Do you feel like you're part of the group?

Question five was designed to understand how each council member understood how the group was set-up, how decisions were made, who made them, power relationships, etc. By this time in the interview, hopefully the members were comfortable talking to me. This question was designed to delve more into the politics of the group, identification, loyalty, the "feel" of working relationships, and members' ideas about who was in charge.

6. Compare your organization to the council.

- a. How is your organization similar or different? Give an example.
- b. What is important to your organization?
- c. How do decisions get made in your organization?
- d. What is the structure of your organization?
- e. How does communication work in your organization?

This question asked about the member's stakeholder organization in order to understand their experience and day-to-day norms as far as structure, processes, practices, and communication goes. I needed to learn how different the collaborative experience was for them.

7. Describe a moment or situation where you felt like your group experienced success. Why? What happened?

8. Describe a moment or situation where you felt tension within your group? Why? What happened?

Questions seven and eight were designed to get members telling stories, talking about goal accomplishment as well as pet peeves.

9. What advice do you have for new community collaborators?

- a. What can you tell them about how to collaborate?
- b. What have you learned through this process?
- c. What are the benefits?
- d. What are the pitfalls?

Question nine was another way to ask what group members thought was most important about their public/private partnership as well as what should be most important. It also served as another way to ask what they did well, and not so well and what they learned along the way.

10. Is there anything else you would like to say or add to this conversation?

Question ten was designed to wrap-up the interview, allow the members to say anything she did not earlier, review what I was going to do with their answers,

and introduce the demographic form if they were designated to fill it out at the end of the interview.